

Best of Spartans and Spectres

by Ordo Warrior

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Summary: With the Fall of Reach nearly complete, the Covenant sends it full might to eliminate one Spartan. With a little of John-117's luck rubbing off to another hyper-leathal soldier, she finds a new fate awaiting her beyond Reach.

1. Chapter 1

****A/N: ****Welcome people I'm treading in overly treaded water. As some of you may have noticed its a crossover of Halo and Mass Effect, of which Noble Six is involved in. Now I'm going to be using the armor configuration I use for her(yes her, not he) and change the 'Lone Wolf' ending. If you don't want to read it, then just leave and say our peace.

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><p>The remnant of Noble team had fought valiantly at every point but even they were no match for the Covenant Empire's ferocity and numbers. Now at their finally hour, Noble Four and Noble Six were the last of their team delivering a very important package to Captain Jacob Keyes. Noble Four had fallen to a Covenant Energy Sword through his back but not before killing the Elite. Noble Six had fought her way through the Covenant Special Operations team and an Elite Field Marshall that stood in the way of the controls for the Mass Driver. Noble Six soon past the two dead Elite Zealots and Emile, who had just enough strength to prop himself against the railing before finally succumbing to his injuries.<p>

As Six continued to destroy Phantom dropships and Banshees, the Covenant battlecruiser had moved into firing range and they had dropped their shields to us the ventral energy projector. The Captain shouted to her over the comm. "Fire! Now, Lieutenant! Hit her in the gut!" With one last charge, Six fired a MAC round through the cruiser's belly causing the magnetic field that guided the plasma to destabilize. From this internal explosion rocked the ship off course.

Keyes confirmed the kill as he radioed, "Good guns, Spartan. All stations: brace for cast-off."

The Pelican dropship carrying Captain Keyes and the package entered one of the _Pillar of Autumn_'s hangars just as the thrusters were starting. Six climbed down the ladder from the controls of the Mass Driver just as the _Pillar of Autumn_ took off from drydock and the Covenant battlecruiser crashed into the surface. Six turned to Emile and the Elite with the kukri jabbed into the left side of his neck. Six knew she wasn't going to have much time left but she resolved that she was going to go down fighting, just as Emile and Carter before her. Six grabbed the kukri and pulled it out of the corpse, giving a good flick to throw off most of the purple blood wiping the rest against the corpse of the Elite. She then grabbed the sheath off of Emile's Security pauldron on his right shoulder. _Rest in peace, Noble Four. I'll make good use of your blade, I promise._ Six strapped the sheath onto her left shoulder guard, a UA/Multi-Threat pauldron, tilted just slightly so she could pull out either the kukri or the combat knife on her upper-left chestplate without fear that her opponent would grab the one she wasn't using.

As Six continued down the building and into the valley, she received one finally transmission. "This is the _Pillar of Autumn_. We're away. And the Package is with us." Six looked up to watch as the Halcyon-class cruiser left the planet's atmosphere. With nothing left, Noble Six moved on.

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><p>So this is how it ends thenâ€¦| These are the thoughts of a soldier who has given in and was ready to accept death's embrace without a fight, but that wasn't the thought going through this soldier's mind. For years she was trained to be the best and she exceeded all expectations, making the top ranking at almost everything she did, even being rated as hyper-lethal. An incredible marksman, a deadly combatant, she always completed her missions. She had just escaped the drydock where she completed her last mission; ensuring the safe delivery of a very special A.I. unit and the escape of the last UNSC cruiser on Reach's continent of Eposz, the Pillar of Autumn. SPARTAN-B312 had nowhere to go, no one to rendezvous with on foot, just an army of Covenant soldiers searching and killing any human survivors left behind on a world that was slowly being turned to glass by their ships as they continued to bombard the surface with plasma. With an M392 Designated Marksman Rifle in hand, a M6G magnum on her hip, Emile's kukri on her shoulder and a combat knife on her chest, Noble Six was ready. She knew she had no way off world, and she knew the Covenant would hunt her down no matter where she might try to flee to, so Six wasn't going to run, she wasn't going to hide, she planned to take as many of them to hell with her as possible .

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><p>Nearly an hour of fighting, using the arms of fallen Spartans and soldiers before her, Six continued to fight against the impossible odds. She had been using the ruined building in the area as her main hold out while sniping off heads or when she needed to let her shields recharge. The Banshees that flew overhead that ignored the fighting before had started to make strafing runs whenever possible. The Covenant even started to drop off a Wraith in their attempt to

bring this lone Spartan down. But Six stood her ground, proud, and continued to fight against all odds. Even with everything she had accomplished, after everything she had done to survive against this unending assault, this Spartan was at the end of her rope. Even these legendary warriors have their limit. Six grabbed the only UNSC weapons left with ammunition, an MA37 Assault Rifle and another magnum, and she continues her assault. The Covenant had stopped sending Uggnoy troops about half an hour ago, relying solely on the Sangheili with Type-1 Energy WeaponSwords. As Six recovered from the last group of Elites, something strange started to happen in the skies above and soon the other combatants started to notice.

A pair of Banshees had turned against the Covenant. One of the Banshees then started to gun down the Elites around Six and any other ground forces it could find while the other assaulted the Wraiths. As Six jabbed Emile's blade up an Elite's gaping maw before using the dying body to take the energy blade of another Elite. She grabbed the Energy Blade out of the dead Elite's hand as she slashed at other. The Banshee was able to destroy one Wraith before the gunner of the second was able to wound the traitor, but the Banshee still had enough control to ram itself into the Wraith destroying them both. A round from one of the retreating Phantoms' heavy plasma cannon destroyed the traitorous Banshee's port wing, causing it to lose control. Six figured the pilot was at least friendly enough that she was going to try and save him. With the area still clear for the time being, Six reached the crash site, the cockpit was already empty, with no sign as to who, or what, was piloting it. The Banshee was still flight worth, and if she could catch a break, Six might be able to find more weapons or a way off planet, though the latter was highly unlikely.

Flying through the skies of Reach was difficult with all of the Covenant ships around but as Six was heading towards CASTLE base, she soon found a small underground bunker entrance that looked intact from her height. As she got closer she soon found it was livelier then she first anticipated. A group of Covenant, led by a Jiralhanae Chieftain was barking orders to a group of Uggnoy and Kig-yar, trying to enter the sealed bunker. Six made strafing runs until the entire Covenant unit was dealt with. Noble Six made a rather hectic landing, given the Banshee had now lost both of its wings; it was rather decent for a crash. Crawling out of the wreck, Six picked up a plasma grenade from the dead Covenant troopers and tossed the activated weapon to the Banshee not letting the Covenant have a potential, if short lived, weapon to use against her later. At the bunker, Noble Six couldn't find any way in; the controls were smashed, wires and circuits were destroyed or removed all together and only a handful of human bodies remained on the surface. But there was more life then apparently visible as the bunker's doors opened, just enough to let the Spartan in. After Six squeezed her way in the doors promptly closed behind her. The bunker was pitch black, with only a few flickering lights giving any sense of direction. The lone Spartan activated her suit's night vision and cautiously pressed forward. She soon found signs of a struggle with Covenant and UNSC corpses scattered about with blood stains on the wall and shell casings on the floor.

Noble Six had traveled deeper into the bunker without any sign of life, other than the flickers of lights that occasional led her down a different path. It was about a minute before she was led to what looked like an underground hangar. Before taking one step into the

small control room to see if any ships remained, flashes of light shined towards her as the sounds of boots, assault rifles at the ready and metal clanking filled the air. Normally Six might have opened fire and killed them all on the spot but she was tired from all fighting, tired from not giving herself time to rest and her radar indicated they were friendlies.

They were a group of five troopers, including a pair of ODSTs. One of the NCO's was the first to recognize her and shouted, "Hold your fire!" This trooper seemed familiar with her but she had seen, fought with and killed many humans. The man walked up to the Spartan and saluted, "Glad to see you again ma'am. Sergeant Major Duvall." Six remembered him now; he held that one strip of beach back at New Alexandria, trying to clear the air for the civilian transports to evacuate.

One of the troopers also walked forward, "I'm glad to see you too, ma'am." The second person was a woman. Six recognized her from her voice; she was the gunnery sergeant that Six helped free from the Brutes back in New Alexandria's hospital.

One of the troopers was falling into a depression as he stated, "What's she going to do that can help us? Yeah, sure, she's a Spartan, but they're only good at one thing, killing. We don't need help with that, we need a way off this rock!"

"That may not necessarily be the case." From out of the shadows a man in fine, clean, clothing came out. He looked like he might be part of ONI. The man walked up to the Spartan and looked her over before he asked her, "Are you SPARTAN-B312?"

Noble Six was quick to respond as she answered, "Yes, sir."

"Then we just might have a chance to make it off Reach before the Covenant decides to glass this sector. Dot!"

The speakers in the area activated, "Yes, director?" The same flat voice that has guided Noble Team during Reach's fall was here.

The man started to work on a nearby console, "Get ready, we're leaving."

The AI answered, "Yes, director. Initiating data transfer."

The man continued explaining, "I am the one who has to make sure that Auntie Dot, along with all of the data she has access too, does not fall into the hands of the Covenant. But there was a lot more data than I expected. Leaving us in the predicament we are currently in. All available transports offworld have already taken off or were destroyed, as I'm sure you're aware of Sierra." He pointed out her exploits in New Alexandria. He continued, "But we do have a vehicle that might be capable of getting us out."

The depressed man from before shouted, "You weren't planning on telling us about this ship?"

The well groomed man replied, "Because we did not have someone who was capable of piloting it properly. Without the proper skill we would probably have been shot down long before we had a chance to exit the planet's atmosphere. But our number one priority is the

security of the human race. As long as the SPARTAN has Dot, we shouldn't have to worry about that." The director, as Dot called him, finished working on the computer and pulled out a data crystal chip. The 'director' delicately handed Noble Six the chip, "Take care of her. No matter what happens, she is not to be captured by the Covenant. Understood?"

Six grabbed the chip, "Got it, sir." Six took the chip in her left hand and placed her assault rifle onto her back. Without hesitation she opened a small port on the back of her GUNGNIR HU/RS helmet and placed the chip inside. When the SPARTANS received their MAJOLNIR Mark V armor they were given an upgraded neural interface that allowed an AI to interface with their brain and armor systems. Noble Six received the upgrade but she had never interfaced with an AI before.

"Now, we are ready to leave." The 'director' started to walk off, "Well, what are you all waiting for? That is unless you want to die here?"

Noble Six and the others were hesitant to follow this very secretive man, until Dot started to speak to Six, "Noble Six. The director will not lead us to any danger. He indeed does have a way to safely get us off Reach, but your cooperation is required."

So far Dot had not led Six astray, soon enough Noble Six started to follow the 'director' and the others followed behind her. The man had led them to a hangar when the lights activated. He had led them to a Black Cat-class subprowler

The depressed trooper from before yelled at the 'director' now, "Are you nuts! You want us to use that to escape?"

The 'director' simply replied, "We had no one among us qualified to fly this ship. Now that the SPARTAN is here we do. Even if she's still adjusting to having Dot with her, she'll still be more than capable of fly us out of here." The 'director' explained, "The ship's been loaded with some supplies, sensitive items and weapons. With all of that and the number of people it's going to be a tight ride."

Before they could load up, the facility started shake from mortar fire. "Looks like the Covenant know we're here. Alright, let's load up people!"

As the troopers and ODST strapped themselves in, Six stopped to speak with the 'director' privately. "Sir. Before, when I was surroundedâ€¦"

"Ah, yes, that. Well, since you did witness it and helped us, I might as well tell you. One of the many projects ONI had underdevelopment was a prototype virus that could allow remote control over various Covenant vehicles. We successfully tested them on Ghosts and Revenants, of which you 'captured' during the initial assault at SWORD base, though initial tests yielded control for a very limited window of time. Because of that ONI decided to side track the project before it really had a chance to start. In short, Dot found you, I used the virus and now here you are."

Six and the 'director' were the last two to get aboard. Just as Six

started the launch sequence, a stronger quake shook the entire area. Dot, though now connected to Six's armor, detected damage to the bunker, "Warning: plasma damage has destroyed the remote access to the bunkers launch bay doors."

The gunnery sergeant wasn't strapped in yet when Dot alerted them. "Gunny!" Duvall shouted as she grabbed an MA37 and shut the hatch.

The gunnery sergeant spoke to them through the intercom, "Sorry to do this to you all, but somebody's got to unlock those doors, and like the 'director' said you're the only one qualified to fly the bird. Watch over the other." With that, she ran back into the facility to find the controls to manually open the hatch. As preparations were just about finished for the ship, the gunnery sergeant found the latches. After disengaging the latches, she had moved to the surface to get out of the way as the ship took off. The gunnery sergeant waved them off as the ship took flew off into the planet's atmosphere. "Godspeed ma'am."

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><p>On board the Covenant supercarrier, Unending Resolve, one of the ships bridge officers found an anomaly leaving the planet's atmosphere. "Shipmaster! I have found a possible human vessel attempting to escape us."<p>

"A 'possible human vessel' bridge officer?"

The officer was hesitant to anger the Sangheili Shipmaster, "T-th-there was an anomaly for a moment but it disappeared. I'm calculating the trajectory now."

"Good, I will not let Supreme Commander Thel 'Vadamee have all of the honor and glory. I want that ship found, and destroyed!"

"Patients, Shipmaster." From out of the shadows, a gravity throne with its San 'Shyuum passenger along with two of his personal honor guards.

The Shipmaster knelt as the gravity throne moved closer, "My Prophet."

The prophet motioned the Shipmaster to rise. "Now, what is this about a human vessel?"

The Shipmaster answered, "The bridge officer detected an anomaly for a moment, but it disappeared. He believes it to be another human ship trying to flee the cleansing of this world."

The prophet looked out to the image of the planet as Covenant ships continued to bombard the planet's surface with plasma, scorching every inch of the surface they covered. The Prophet of Pity openly declared, "Their heresy can never be forgiven. That is why it is our duty to purge them from the galaxy, and in doing so, brings us all one step closer to the Great Journey. I give my grace to pursue these humans. Do not let one escape justice. But we must find their homeworld if we wish to truly cleanse their heretical stain from the galaxy. We need at least one alive, preferably their ship's 'spirits'."

The Shipmaster bowed his head as he pounded his right hand, formed into a fist, onto his chest, "By the words of the Prophets."

* * *

><p>AN: **Yes I know, the 'virus' was a rather unusual and extreme thing to help save Six but hey I've got to get her off Reach somehow. Yes, sorry I did that thing with the Gunny but I really didn't want too many marines(besides they're usually cannon fodder for Covives anyway). For those who have watched Halo Legends, then you know that O'Brien and Cortez are from the short Babysitter. Pity is a member of the Covenant Council so he get to throw his weight around against the Shipmaster. I haven't revealed much about the Spartan's armor and it'll happen later. I'm going to spitfire several chapters now since I've backlogged about 58 Word pages of this already.

No Mass Effect stuff just yet, it'll happen in the next chapter.

2. Chapter 2

**A/N: **Next chapterâ€|

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><p>Six pulled out a wire from the console and attached it into the jack on the back of her helmet. As the Spartan started to make the necessary preparations for the jump, the sensors started to flash red. One of the ODST, Master Sergeant Cortez, was the first to ask the Spartan, "What's wrong now?"<p>

Dot answered the ODST, "Apologies Master Sergeant. Noble Six was activating the slipspace capacitor until we detected a Covenant vessel searching the vicinity."

The 'director' immediately asked the AI, "What class?"

"Given its mass, I would have to guess it is a supercarrier."

"Oh that's just great! We're screwed! In space or on the surface, we're all going to die!"

As the trooper became more frantic, the 'director' grabbed the medical supplies and injected the man with a small dose of polypseudomorphine to calm him down. After falling asleep the 'director' assured the others, "That'll keep him quiet for a few hours. Now to deal with the Covenantâ€|" He had to think of something before he spoke again. "Dot, do you still have access to the satellite feeds?"

"Unfortunately director, I do not. Even if Noble Six inserted me directly into the ship's system, my signal would easily be detected by the Covenant."

"Then we have only one option."

Dot saw Six's mind and saw what was planning, "I agree with your

assessment, Noble Six."

The other ODS'T yelled at them, "What'd you agree with? Dot?"

The 'director' strapped himself in next to the ODS'T. Before O'Brien could remove the harness, the 'director' stopped him. "It would be best if you stay seated."

Taking a few minutes to move out of range of the supercarrier's weapons they moved towards a safe slipspace entry point. Now close enough to the SSEP, Noble Six started to warm up the slipspace capacitor as Dot noted to the rest of the crew, "Stealth systems disengaged."

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><p>Suddenly the bridge officer found the same anomaly again. This time it was constant and the Sangheili could easily identify it. "Shipmaster, they've reappeared! It is outside the range of the plasma turrets."<p>

The gold armored Sangheili asked the officer, "What of the laser turrets?"

"We are obtaining a target lock now, sir."

The Shipmaster started to order his men, "Lower the power levels to disable the human ship and launch a squadron of Seraphs. We want to capture them for processing but if we must, destroy them without mercy."

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><p>"Noble Six, I have detected Seraph class fighters on approach." Six ignored Dot's warning as she continued the preparations for the jump.<p>

The last trooper, Roger, asked Dot, "Doesn't this bucket have weapons?"

Dot unemotionally answered, "Unfortunately this vessel has not been outfitted with any means of defense. Our best chance for survival is entering slipspace."

"Then what's taking so long?"

Dot answered for Six, "Noble Six is attempting to. She is also preparing to evade the Seraph fighters. She is pushing the subprowler to its limits both in power and operations."

Duvall gripped the seat harness telling the others, "We need to trust the Spartan for now." As Six continued to work the console, Duvall spoke under his breath, keeping it to himself not letting the others hear him, "I sure hope you know what you're doing ma'am."

Six finished the prepping but the Seraphs were starting to catch up. Now Noble Six was starting to pull off a number of evasive maneuvers to shake off her pursuers.

Once they were in range, the Seraphs opened fire attempting to

disable the craft. Six once flew the prototypes of the YSS-100 Sabre starfighter but this subprowler could not fight back or out maneuver the Seraphs. Noble Six was having a bit of difficulty compensating for the size difference but she started to get used to it as she started to evade the fire better. The Seraphs though were also missing some of their shots purposefully, trying to coral them back towards the supercarrier. Six wasn't blind to the trap, but for the moment she let them lead.

The humans saw she had turned around and was heading straight towards the Covenant ship. Roger tried to get her attention, "Hey Spartan, we want to head away from that ship not towards it!"

The 'director' finally saw what she was possibly planning, as he watched her hand press a sequence of buttons. He braced for something as he warned the others, "Get ready. This isn't going to end well."

Unbeknownst to the others, the ship carried a far more valuable item that far exceeded the location of Earth. As Six started up the slipspace capacitor again, the artifact started to react. This sudden power surge didn't go unnoticed by the humans, or the Covenantâ€¦

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><p>"Shipmaster, the Luminary is reacting to the power surge!"<p>

The Shipmaster did not need the bridge officer to tell him what that meant. The Sangheili turned to the San 'Shyuum and knelt to him, "My prophet, the accursed humans dare to defile a holy relic of the Gods. I ask for permission to cleanse these stains and purify the holy relic."

"Yes, we cannot let the blessings of the Gods be left in the hands of those unworthy of being in their divine presence." The Prophet put on a display as he stretched both arms out and shouted to the crew, "Hear me, members of the Covenant. The Ancients left these divine relics for those worthy of following in their sacred footsteps to the Great Journey, but these humans seek to stop our ascension. We will not let their heresy stop us, we cannot. This test of our faith will prove to the Gods we are worthy of their gifts. We are close to the Great Journey my brothers, soon humanity will be crushed and the path to the Great Journey will unfold before us. Shipmaster, to purify this space, I give you my permission and the blessing of the gods to destroy them."

"I understand, Prophet. I will not let them escape justice's might." The Shipmaster stood up and shouted to his men, "Open fire on that ship. I want to see the human corpses float off to the abyss."

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><p>"Alert: power fluctuations detected from Covenant vessel. Noble Six, they are arming their weapon systems." With little choice left and the slipspace capacitor ready, and in accordance to Cole Protocol, Six was going to try and jump to random coordinates away from Earth in the hope of losing the Covenant.<p>

"Hold tight!" Six finished and turned the ship about. As the

slipspace activated, the artifact reacted. Six made a sudden nosedive just as they entered slipspace. The slipspace opened underneath the supercarrier carrier and they were propelled into the unknown.

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><p>As the ship entered slipspace one of the laser turrets fired, hitting one of the ship's engines. The Shipmaster bellowed, "Track their vector! Find where they are going!"<p>

Another bridge officer soon replied, "Sir, the anomaly from before is interfering with theâ€¦!"

"I care not for excuses! I have never let a single human escape my grasp, I will not now!" The Shipmaster looked at the monitor as he tried to find a way to find what had happened. "Prophet of Pity, is it possible that the humans have found a way to activate the holy relic, thus making it impossible for us to track them?"

The San 'Shyuum took a moment for himself to think about the possibility. "Yes, there have been artifacts that are known to affect slipspace travel. The only foreseeable problem I can conceive will be maintaining contact with the fleet."

"My Prophet, we will need reinforcements as a precaution if the humans have a Demon with them."

The Prophet of Pity was forced to make a decision as the slipspace wake was dissipating. "Shipmaster, requisition from the Supreme Commander three agricultural support ships, two heavy destroyers and a CCS-class battlecruiser to pursue the filth. That should be more than enough to deal with any Demon."

The Shipmaster quickly made contact with his fleet's Supreme Commander. The monitor displayed a Sangheili in an elegant purple cape with a highly decorated helmet. "Shipmaster Rayta 'Zaconomee. Why have you contacted me?"

Rayta had already knelt down in respect to his superior, "Supreme Commander. A human craft has entered slipspace, but we cannot track its vector. We believe they used a holy relic to achieve this. I ask permission to pursue and request a support fleet."

The Supreme Commander was not impressed, "How was it that they were not destroyed like so many others before them?"

"We did not detect them at first, but when we did I was under advisement of the Prophet of Pity, I attempted to capture them. Interrogate them until they reviled the location of their homeworld so we may burn their heresy from the galaxy and clear the path for the Great Journey. I do not mean to sound impudent, but a decision must be made quickly before the wake is closed."

The Supreme Commander almost seemed displeased but he promptly answered the Rayta's plea, "Very well, Fleet Master Rayta Nar 'Zaconomee. You may take a small task force and give chase. I will expect all of the ships to return and the coordinates to the human homeworld in hand." Before the newly appointed Fleet Master could give his thanks, the Supreme Commander warned him, "Do not return without the humans dead and those coordinates in hand." With that the

Supreme Commander ended the exchange.

Rayta turned about, "My brothers, let the hunt began!" Many of the Elites gave a roar of excitement as his ship, Unending Resolve, and the ships Pity advised taking moved in to follow them into the slipspace wake. Anticipating his ships would arrive to the destination before the humans, Rayta Nar 'Zaconomee wasn't going to take any chances. He wanted that ship captured but he also wanted to make sure any Demon that may be hiding in that ship was the first one they killed.

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><p>As expected, even traveling through the wake, the Covenant vessels were able to exit slipspace before the humans. Unknown however, was their current location. As the NAV computers tried to locate their exact coordinates, the communication officers noticed something rather disturbing. "Fleet Master, we cannot reestablish communications with the fleet."<p>

"Then reestablish communication with High Charity."

"We've tried, sir. It's as ifâ€|they don't exist."

Just as suddenly, a strange grey ship appeared out of the blue. Unlike the bulky design of most human vessels, this one was more streamline, similar to many Covenant vessels. This particular ship though had the body similar to a miniature insect without its wings. "Prophet, this does not look like a creation left by the gods."

The Prophet gazed at the vessel, studding its design, "It does not share the same architecture as anything we know. No, this vessel is something different."

Before Pity could contemplate further, the comms buzzed with life. "Fleet Master, they are attempting to contact us. Should I proceed?"

"For now. I want to know what has happened, and why we cannot reestablish communication with the fleet."

A stuttering sound started to filter through first. Soon enough a gruff voice followed. Rayta Nar 'Zaconomee then said, "Get a Huragok out here to translate this creature." A large jelly-like creature was escorted in by a pair of Kig-yar. The Huragok was strapped with several metal pieces to its bulbous back and small head. The one-eyed helmet turned to the Fleet Master as he had the comm officer replay the message. The bioluminescent slave was quick with translating the message for the Fleet Master. The message was asking who they were and why they have approached this restricted area.

Pity then made a command, "Tell them, we are the Covenant and we seek the path to the Great Journey."

The Huragok replied to this unknown creature, using the exact thing the San 'Shyuum said. They soon received a response from the unknown creature. The Huragok translated it to equate that 'He did not understand.'

The Prophet tried to think of how to word his next response.

"Huragok, tell them this. 'We follow the path of the Holy Ones to enlightenment and godhood'."

The Huragok replied as Pity said, and no response for several minutes. As the Fleet Master was plotting an attack strategy a message was received. It stated they would like to arrange a meeting with their leader before anything else happened. Along with the message was bundled coordinate data.

Rayta then shouted at the bridge officers, "Check those coordinates. Make sure it isn't a trap." The Sangheilis worked quickly and displayed the galaxy on the holotank. They zoomed in on the cluster, and then into the system as it highlightedâ€¦nothing. The coordinates led to the system but not a planet. The Fleet Master could only assume it was a trap but wasn't going to wait. "All ships, prepare to engage!"

But the Prophet stopped him. "It may be that our data on the galaxy differ slightly. Let us first investigate further, Fleet Master."

The Fleet Master was questioning the Prophet's unusual act, "Why do you want to show mercy to these things?"

"I do not." Pity explained, "These creatures are obviously not humans and they may yet prove to be worthy allies in order to further our own goal for the Great Journey." Pity then turned to the Huragok, "Ask them for data on the galaxy. Tell them we want to insure accuracy on the coordinates."

The Huragok made a purring sound as it sent the message. They were quickly responded with more data. Now the bridge officers were entering the data and comparing it to what was in their systems.

As they lined up the data it became abundantly clear, the galaxy map they have was off by a margin of twelve degrees. When they compared known celestial bodies, a majority of them were in their correct positions. But when they search for specific bodies, like the Sangheili homeworld Sangheilios, they couldn't find it.

"What trickery is this?"

Even Pity was perplexed by this unexpected revelation. "I do not know. Search for Janjur Qom." Nothing. They continued this for the others Covenant worlds and each system were uninhabited or controlled by an unknown species.

"Prophet, what does this mean?"

Pity was uncertain. "Something must have happened. We had not found a Sacred Ring, so that could only leave to the conclusion that the holy relic's activation must have caused some type of alteration in slipspace. What it is, I'm not entirely sure of yet. This makes our precedent of finding the humans all the more important. But no matter what happens to the humans, we must retrieve the holy relic, undamaged." The Prophet of Pity turned to one of the bridge officers. "Use this new data and the coordinates to find where this 'meeting' is to take place."

Now the coordinates led to a rather lush world in the Northeastern

quadrant of the galaxy. The Fleet Master noted, "If we leave now we will miss our chance in capturing the humans swiftly and with ease."

The Prophet of Pity answered with a retort, "Yet the only reason we brought so many is to face down the possibility of a Demon; this fear is not unfounded but the facts are. I believe it is worth our time to investigate. Huragok, tell our new 'friends' we will meet them at the designated location."

With their answer given the strange ship disembarked as the Covenant vessels prepared to jump to the destination. Unfortunately the Fleet Master was correct, as a new slipspace portal emerged in mere minutes after they had left.

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><p>Having exited slipspace without finding a single Covenant ship, this only made Six even more uneasy. Six removed Dot from her armor and interfaced her directly into the ship and pulled the jack out of her helmet. "Dot, scan forâ€|anything."<p>

"Scanning."

As Dot did that, Six moved about to check on the others. "Is everyone alright?"

"We're all fine, for the moment." The 'director' moved to the cockpit to see what was going on. "Where are the Covenant?"

Duvall was being hopefully optimistic as he said, "We might have outrun them."

"That is highly unlikely, Sergeant Major. Covenant ships are far superior to any known UNSC vessel. Covenant craft are also known toâ€|"

Cortez interrupted, "Track our slipspace vectors. We don't need a lesson Dot, we need to know if we're safe."

Dot replied, "I cannot be certain. The power surge has disrupted many of the ship's systems. Coupled with having to wait for the slipspace capacitor to cool down, it will take time in order to restore all operations to appropriate levels."

Cortez and O'Brien had a private chat about their unique 'friend', ODST to ODST. "I still don't like this, Cortez. Something about him doesn't feel right."

"The guy rubs me the wrong way too, but other than intuition he hasn't done anything to us other than hold out on bits."

"Large bits."

Cortez knew better than to over think this one. "ONI tends to hold info out all of the time. Why should he be any different? All I do know is that he's saved our lives. I still don't trust him, but I think we need him for now."

It had been a few minutes and Dot reported back to Noble Six. "Scan

complete. I can detect residual radiation from Covenant vessels and entering slipspace."

The 'director' conferred with Dot. "Why would the Covenant leave? They must have realized they would have encountered us if they waited. Is it possible they encountered something more 'interesting'?"

"I cannot determine that, director. There is insufficient data for me to speculate any further."

As the 'director' continued to confer with Dot, Six went to investigate the unusual power surge from before. Dot had indicated that the spike originated from within the cargo hold. She found crates filled with weapons, ammunition, medical supplies, a number of different armor abilities and the like but nothing that could have caused the power fluctuation earlier. As Sierra-B312 continued through she soon found something, research notes and a number of strange objects. All of the objects looked similar to Covenant technology but they looked more like they were closely related to the ancient vessel Dr. Elizabeth Halsey was in, hidden beneath SWORD base. Six read through the material trying to find out what the 'director' really knew about these strange object.

The majority of them were purple crystals that were glowing very brightly. They were obviously the one behind the sudden power surge to the prowlers systems. But the other object looked like a simple silver orb but there was something unusual about this object. There were several notes referring to visions and whispers from the team who first encountered the object. The report also claimed that the orb had shrunk from an enormous size of about two warthogs down to this helmet sized ball. The orb was heavy when Six first grabbed it but the orb was producing some type of repulsion as it floated in the Spartan's hand. Six continued to read the notes and learned more about these 'visions'. They describe incredibly large ships attacking several worlds and metallic humanoids, disfigured and morphed slashing and killing many. They also described a ruined world where something laid buried, dormant. But it seemed the object, whatever secrets it held, no longer functions or does not have the correct stimulant to activate.

As Six continued to look through the papers a figure crept up behind her. Normally she might have seen or heard this individual but with everything she's endured, the Spartan was at her limit. A sharp pricking pain was felt in her neck when she grabbed someone's arm and pulled it away. The sleeve wasn't armor, it was fabric. She turned around to find the 'director' had jabbed her with a syringe, and the tube was empty. As the drug started to take effect the 'director' told her, "I'm sorry for this, Sierra-312 but we need to talk about your training later. There was enough polypseudomorphine to knock out horse for a few hours, I'm sure the effect will be similar for you." Noble Six tried to keep consciousness but in her fatigued state the moderate dose of polypseudomorphine quickly overcame her. As she slowly lost consciousness the 'director' told her one last thing, "Don't worry, you and the others will be just fineâ€¦"

* * *

><p>AN: **I have to give credit for the name of the Shipmaster(turned Fleet Master) as well as a Special Operations

Commander to user JustHitTheMark, thank you for your help and for letting me use the names. All of the stuff Six found stored in the back of the Black Cat will play a roll later, just need to find a way of writing it in is all.

3. Chapter 3

The 'director' had returned from the cargo area, exhausted from dragging the Spartan on his own. Duvall and the ODS'Ts moved to help. Cortez didn't like this now that they don't have a pilot. "What happened to her?"

She laid her down on some of seats as the 'director' explained, "I wanted to check on the equipment in the back when I found her like this. I can only assume fatigue finally caught up to her."

O'Brien only questioned this unusual story, "A Spartan, fall victim to fatigue?"

The 'director' quickly responded, "She has been fighting for over a full day now and hasn't slept, nether has any of us I'm sure. But even Spartans have to sleep."

As Noble Six laid there her arm started to tense up, a memory perhaps or a nightmare. Cortez turned to the 'director'. "Now that our pilot is out, who's going to fly this bird?"

The 'director' seemed too prepared for the situation. He calmly answered the ODS'T, "Dot is still within the ship's systems. She should be able to assist with piloting."

Duvall moved up to the cockpit, he looked over at the controls then asked Dot, "Are you really going to make this easier to fly?"

"Yes. I can assist with the more technical functions while leaving the more rudimentary controls to you."

Duvall asked the AI, "How much longer until we can leave?"

"With the current resynchronization, time estimated for the slipspace capacitor to be operational: 30 minutes."

With Dot's answer Duvall returned to the others. "We've got another thirty minutes before we can leave. I think we should all get some rest. We won't be able to defend ourselves if we fall asleep in the middle of combat." The Sergeant Major turned back to Dot, "Can you still activate the stealth systems?"

Dot checked the programs that were still available to her before she answered, "Yes. It is one of the few systems that have finished rebooting."

"Good, activate them and keep the sensors on full alert. Wake us when the ship is ready or you detect something."

"Yes, Sergeant Major."

* * *

><p>Arriving to the strange system the Fleet Master of Unending Resolve barked out orders, "Scan every centimeter of that world. I want to learn more about the one we are to meet."<p>

The world was now on display on the bridge's holotank. This world was virtually untouched, a virgin world ripe for colonization, but the scans would soon reveal how far from the truth that really was. There were several active, unknown, transmissions across one particular coastal line. There were a number of anti-air defense towers stationed around a large, almost human looking, complex. The life-form readings registered a small army in number but no human signatures. The Luminary was also used and it did not detect any Forerunner artifacts on this tropical world.

A voice using the same language the gruff voice from the other ship started to shout on open channels. The Huragok from before, Easy to Adjust, translated it to mean 'Who are you? Why have you come here?'

The Prophet of Pity then stated, "We are here to meet with your leader. I believe he is expecting us." Easy to Adjust relied as Pity instructed. They soon received a response that 'Saren' will meet them at the following location. The data lead to a small beach surrounded by AA guns.

Rayta shouted, "Prepare a Phantom, and get the Huragok down to the hangar."

* * *

><p>Saren Arterius was with several geth troopers and a few of his krogans waiting for these new acquaintances encountered about an hour ago. Soon enough a strange purple craft, about 32 meters in length, with a large cannon underneath the nose started to make its approach to them. The ship's design looked like a shell from a terrapin with a concave underbelly. The cannon kept Saren and the others in its range as the ship lowered itself closer toward the ground. A large circle on the underside of the ship, near the engines, opened up as a bright light emerged from it. When the circle opened a strange purple creature with several metal armor pieces appeared. After this strange floating creature emerged a large being that remained in the light as it floated down to the shallow water below. The only thing noticeable about the being was that it was covered in gold armor with hoofed feet. The shoulder pauldrons were elongated and the helmet seemed ornamental, with horn-like protrusions curving back. Following this obvious warrior came a strange being that sat in a type of hover throne. This brown, long neck being was dressed in highly decorated garb with a gold crown adorned on its head and gold wings that sat on the base of the neck. One of its three fingered hands started to press a series of buttons on the arm of his throne.<p>

The 2.6 meter tall being in gold armor was the first to approach them. Saren was able to get a better look at the being and noticed everything he could about it; its hands had four digits, two fingers in the middle and two opposable thumbs on the outside. As it walked Saren could now see its legs were digitigrade, probably making it fast when it needed to be and capable of jumping great distances.

It started to shout in a truly alien language and as it did an unusual feature was noticed; the jaw was quadruple-hinged, with an

upper jaw and four mandible-like lips on the sides, each capable of independent movement and each lined with their own set of teeth. The bulbous creature that exited first floated over to the gold one before it moved closer to Saren. It started to reach out for Saren's omni-tool but stopped when the geth accompanying Saren aimed their weapons upon the creature. The other two beings paused for a moment, waiting to see what would happen. Saren raised his hand, telling the geth to stand down. "It is alright. Let the creature examine me." The long neck curled up waiting for a sign when it saw the geth lower their weapons. In a matter of seconds the creature's four tentacles latched onto Saren's omni-tool, removed it, and started to augment it. In a matter of seconds, it formed the omni-tool into several different, functioning, forms before returning it to its original form and returning it to Saren in the exact location it was located. With its curiosity sated the creature floated back to the side of the gold armored being.

The gold armored one started to speak again but this time the bulbous creature started to transmit data directly to Saren's omni-tool, a translated text of everything the being was saying. He stated, 'I care little of who you are or why you wished to speak with us. We are on a holy quest to purge the galaxy of a scourge that dares to deny us our right. Help us or step aside but do not impede us, less you wish to feel our wrath.'

After that rather intriguing opening Saren introduced himself. He started with a bow, "Forgive the impertinence, I am Saren Arterius. Spectre. I too am on a holy quest, a quest to bring back ancient gods."

The gold armored being spoke once more. The translation read, 'You name yourself after a vehicle? And you dare claim that you are on a holy quest?'

The being in the throne hovered in front of the warrior. It started to speak the same language the taller gold armored being spoke. The creature translated it for Saren as it did for the warrior. It stated, 'There is no need for us to engage in unnecessary bloodshed. You claim to be on a holy quest as we are. Enlighten us on your 'quest'.'

Saren then told them a twisted truth about his 'quest', "Certainly. My gods are still in existence and they are willing to aid those worthy of be 'elevated' to their status. They are the pinnacle of evolution, beings of perfection. Unfortunately there are those who would not see this holy selection and misinterpret it out of fear. Fear that they will not be allowed to join, fear that they will be left behind, and fear of the unknown. There were those in the past who have impeded their return, so now I am their instrument, their voice so that they may make their glorious return."

The priest looking being placed one of its hands against its jaw after the jelly creature translated for them. 'This does sound similar to our gods but our gods are no longer here. They used the seven sacred rings to bring about a divine wind to propel them to their godhood. Our gods left these sacred rings behind so that those who are worthy may find them and follow the path of the Great Journey. But we seek to exterminate the vial creatures that would impede us from fulfilling this destiny. Those who's unworthy touch would seek to destroy the holy relics of our gods.'

Saren was now trying to convince the long necked priest to see their goal might not be too far off from one another. "I too seek the elimination of those who would impede in our process, in that we share a commonality. I still require some information before we can proceed with helping the gods return."

The warrior did not seem to hold Saren in the same regard as the priest. He wanted to strike Saren but kept his discipline, instead he yelled at him through their intermediate. 'You claim your gods are still here. Then prove it to us. Call your god so we may look upon him ourselves.'

Saren was more than willing to oblige. "With pleasure." He then made a display as he stretched out his arms when a large ship appeared to break through the cloud line, "Behold, my god. Sovereign!"

The warrior and priest looked at the two kilometer long vessel for several seconds. Saren noticed the warrior's left eye move just slightly, as the slit pupil looked back as though he was listening to another speak. The warrior was first to look back to Saren as it started to speak, 'You call this a god? It is a cruiser at best.'

Before Saren could counter, Sovereign defended itself and spoke, "I am Sovereign! We will span the galaxy in our 'uplifting'."

The priest denoted, 'Parlor tricks. One could easily be broadcasting from within the vessel.'

Saren assured them, "True. But none of my men are currently in that ship. No one is."

The warrior roared and grabbed a small metal handle on his hip, raising it to his face. As he spoke, his hand squeezed the handle and a pair of 1.26 meter long dark blue blades materialized themselves from the sides of the handle. The blade curved around the hand and moved closer together down points with sparks occasionally jumping from one side to the other, almost mirroring a Mass Relay in shape and form, in particular the two prongs that represented the tip. The warrior soon shouted, 'You place your faith in such a machine! They will only doom you to your enemy as they tried to do to the Gods against the Parasite!'

The geth and krogan with Saren turned their weapons trained on the gold warrior as he readied to strike Saren. Saren stepped back, "I assure you, there is mistrust towards AI here as well. But as you can see," Saren opened his arms as he glanced at the forces behind him, "we can work together to achieve upon ourselves greatness."

The priest grabbed a hold of the warrior's left shoulder. The warrior looked down to the priest before finally deactivating the blade and stepping back. 'This is most unexpected. Do you claim you control these machines?'

Saren explained, "I found Sovereign. But he and I hold an agreement. I help him bring about the coming uplifting, and he will insure my people join them. These machines, these geth, also seek enlightenment of which Sovereign can offer to them. We all have much to gain and just as much to loss."

This did not seem to comfort the golden warrior but the priest was contemplating this new information. The priest then asked Saren, 'If we help you, if we help accelerate your goals, what guarantee can we receive from you and your god that we would be help in our holy quest.'

Saren bowed, "I assure you, if you are willing to help us, I promise we will assist you in your quest."

The warrior and priest conversed privately as the creature simply floated there. They continued to speak for a few seconds before the priest nodded to the creature. As the priest spoke the creature now translated. 'If you will excuse us, we need to discuss this further. We will contact you when we have come to our decision.' The priest then gave a signal to the floating creature. The warrior and priest's bodies flickered before finally disappearing, the only thing that remained were two silver orbs with blue glyphs glowing carved into them. The floating creature grabbed both orbs with its tentacles and continued to float there.

* * *

><p>As the Huragok waited with the holo-drones, the Fleet Master voiced his concerns. "Prophet of Pity I must object. We cannot trust these AI. The Holy Texts have statedâ€|"<p>

"I am aware of the Holy Texts!" Pity quickly regained his composure after such an outburst against the Sangheili, "I am aware of their teachings, but I believe we might be able to manipulate them to work for us. A calculated risk, yes, but if we gain valuable allies today, it will mean a swifter death for humanity."

Rayta still had other concerns, "I still do not believe going down there personally is wise. They cannot be trusted yet, not with your life, Prophet."

Pity conceded, "Very well, Fleet Master, if you are so troubled. We will use the holo-drones."

* * *

><p>The floating creature received a signal from the ship above as it released its hold over the silver orbs. The two orbs activated and projected holograms of the warrior and priest from before. The priest spoke, 'We will aid you in your quest. And in exchange I hope you are willing to aid us.'<p>

Saren graciously replied, "But of course. You have my solemn vow to aid you. Out of mere curiosity, what beings impede your 'Great Journey'?"

The warrior was quick in his response. 'They are unclean creatures that only see to defile holy relics. The only admirably feature about them is their bravery and their demons. Accursed humansâ€|'

Saren was now slightly confused. "Humans? They are the ones you wish to destroy?"

The warrior was obviously displeased with how Saren reacted. 'You

seem to know these creatures.'

Saren answered with some hesitation, "Almost twenty-two years now, the humans have become a part of the galactic community at large. The only war the humans have fought was against my people."

The warrior was obviously angered by this discrepancy, 'Impossible! We have had our campaign against the vial filth for nearly three decades! Don't you dare tell me what they have not done!'

The priest stopped the warrior from continuing his rage. 'Tell me, Saren, how is it possible that you have encountered the humans yet we were not found or relics of our gods?'

"The only relics found are from the Protheans, a dead ancient civilization now." Before either the warrior or priest could say another word, Saren suggested a possibility, "I believe what has happened is that you and your fellow companions must have traveled through to an alternate universe. A universe where humans continue to exist, but none of your kind, or your gods, ever existed. It is the most plausible theory without going to heavily into science fiction."

The two seemed troubled by this notion but something on their minds seemed to indicate Saren wasn't far from the truth. Unlike before, the creature did not translate a word as the warrior and priest had a discussion amongst themselves.

* * *

><p>"My Prophet, surely you don't believe this outlandish theory? There must be other explanations as to why we can't contact the fleet."<p>

"Then name one for me, Fleet Master." This made the Sangheili silent. Pity then told him, "I understand your mistrust, and your duty to protect me, but I feel if we work with this Saren and use what knowledge and resources he has, we can find the humans, the relic and the information we seek. In exchange for some minor tools or aid."

Rayta turned to look at the massive vessel above that called itself Sovereign. "I do not trust this Saren. He is an outsider and worse, he trusts AI. The vessel is bad enough, but how many others like theâ€|gethâ€|are there, hundreds, thousands! We must follow the teaching of the Gods, we cannot trust AI. They will only succeed in impeding the Great Journey."

Pity then rebuttled, "Yes, but in this time of unknown, we are outnumbered and disconnected from the Covenant fleet. We need those who are knowledgeable of this new galaxy and its ways. And we must also watch our numbers."

The Fleet Master argued, "My men are strongâ€|"

"But are they capable?" Pity continued, "These machines, theseâ€|geth, they seemâ€|expendable. We may find use for them yet."

* * *

><p>After the obvious argument, the priest floated over to Saren. Now the creature translated for Saren again. 'We will agree to aid you in your quest, if you are willing to agree and aid ours.'<p>

Saren threw out his arm in agreement, "It's a deal." The priest simply bowed its head to Saren, being only a hologram. "First, I need to know how capable your warriors are. There is a cargo frigate that holds something valuable. They do not realize the true value of thisâ€|trinket. I need you to scout them out and bring the artifact to me, back here. The crew of the cargo ship is expendable. They are expected within a nearby system soon." Saren transmitted the coordinate data via omni-tool to the bulbous creature as it seemed capable of deciphering the information.

The warrior seemed more disgruntled than before. But it pounded his right breast plate with his fist and told Saren, 'Your relic will be found no matter how many ships we must gouge.'

With that the two holograms dissipated and the bulbous creature grabbed the orbs again. This time the creature floated back up into the strange ship through the portal it used earlier. With the creature onboard the ship turned around and left the planet.

Sovereign conferred with Saren about this new arrangement he had made. "Those creatures are not trustworthy."

Saren assured the Reaper, "It will be fine. By the time they realized what they have done, there will be nothing capable of stopping us."

4. Chapter 4

With everyone resting, the 'director' gave Noble Six an extra dose of polypseudomorphine while the others were asleep, to keep her 'asleep' until they returned to UNSC space.

Soon enough though Dot alerts the group, "Sergeant Major, there are enough systems operational for a slipspace jump."

Duvall woke up and climbed into the cockpit. "Start spinning up the drive. And get us home."

Cortez then expressed concern about their course. "Sergeant Major, shouldn't we make at least one more blind jump before we head towards any of the Inner Colonies, or Earth?"

Duvall was planning to jump as close as he could toward Earth, but with the possibility of cloaked Covenant ships, he couldn't take the risk. "Dot, correct course heading."

Dot politely asked, "Where to, Sergeant Major?"

"We follow Cole Protocol. We make one more random jump away from Earth, then we turn around and try to get there before the Covenant can follow." With that said Dot made the necessary course correction and jumped into slipspace.

Unfortunately, these strange radiation spikes didn't go unnoticed, in particular the few moments of Hawking radiation with each vessel's departure. An unmanned drone, hidden within the nearby asteroid field had recorded all of the data it could gather and transmitted the data on highly encrypted data streams. As the data stream started to fill several holographic monitors, the man looking over the data became rather intrigued by the information it held. A puff of smoke hovered over the man's head like an angel's halo, but this man was no saint. The man was almost in a smile as he continued to read the data, he seemed to be contemplating a means of finding these new unusual technological achievements.

* * *

><p>As they were told, Unending Resolve and the other Covenant vessels waited in the nearby system for any cargo vessel that traveled through. Eventually they encountered a cargo ship at the specified location and jammed its comm. channels. One of the destroyers destroyed the ship's engines with a blast from a single plasma torpedo. With the ship disabled, Fleet Master Rayta Nar 'Zaconomee sent boarding teams to search and secure the ship. Three Covenant boarding craft attached themselves onto the ship near key locations; the bridge, the cargo hold and communications. The Kig-yar were first to enter the ship, utilizing their point defense gauntlets to full use. The majors were pushing forward against the enemy as the other Kig-yar minors and the Uggnoy provided support. What was unexpected was the crew of this strange vessel. They were facing short, bulbous beings wearing full-body pressure suits along with beings that looked similar to Saren; averaging at 1.8 meter tall, three taloned hands, two clawed feet, reptilians with mandibles on the sides of their mouths, a rounded disk around their heads, and large spurs on their back legs. What made thing even more confusing was the fact that they were using slug based weaponry, not energy or plasma weaponry like the Covenant.<p>

As the Uggnoy and Kig-yar files flushed out the security forces, a Sangheili team escorted two Huragok with them to take control of the ship's systems. Commander Raja 'Locomee took a pair of his Special Operation Sangheili to take control of the bridge. Stealthfully, the Sangheili team was a single door away from the bridge of the vessel. From the small window they could see one of the bulbous creatures at the controls and from the view it looked like it was alone. The three Sangheili used their active camouflage before they stormed the small room. The Commander nodded to one of his men as he cut the wires to the magnetic clams holding the door closed. With the door completely open the pilot seemed to be in a panicked state. They could hear it breathe heavily as it tried to see who it was. The Sangheili moved into the room slowly finding the room to have more than what they were lead to believe. Two of the Saren lookalikes were at guard next to the door had their weapons at the ready, waiting to see who would walk through the open door. In an instant, the two Special Operation Sangheili grabbed the reptiods by their throats, knocking the weapons out of their hands. As the two decloaked and activated their energy daggers, Commander Raja rushed to the pilot, grabbing it by one of its breathing tubes. As the stout being dangled in his hand feebly trying to flee, the two guards with him were quickly killed off with swift jabs from the energy daggers into their skulls and spines.

The Commander reported to his men, "I have captured the pilot. The rest are disposable."

With that news the sub-commander took command of the Kig-yar and Uggnoy forces fighting the enemy. "Encircle the enemy! Do not give them a place to hide!"

The Kig-yar point defense gauntlets were taking a pounding from the weapons fire, but like human weapons, the attacks were bouncing off the energy shields as the Kig-yar pushed forward and attacked with the plasma pistols in their left hand. The Plasma Pistols alone were tearing through these aliens and their rather pathetic shields but the Sangheili and Uggnoy joined in the assault as green and blue bolts from Plasma Pistols, Plasma Rifles and Plasma Repeaters burned through the air, singing their targets and burning away at the enemy's armor and skin. Like a human, the last reptoid continued to fight valiantly against the uneven odds. He had killed a few Uggnoy troops but the sub-commander planned to deal with him personally. With his Plasma Rifle in his left hand, the sub-commander grabbed his Energy Sword and moved in on the last opponent. The sub-commander only rushed him as he saw the weapon it had overheated, similar to how many Covenant plasma weaponry overheat after using it for too long. Before the reptoid could open fire again the sub-commander was right at him and used his momentum to stab the Energy Sword into the reptoid's abdomen, lifting him single-handedly into the air. The reptoid spat out dark blue blood onto the sub-commander's helmet before finally succumbing to the burns and shock.

Not even five minutes since the assault was initiated by the ships, the crew of this cargo vessel have been slaughtered or captured. The Huragok had found a manifesto of everything on board the ship, including personal possessions of the crew. Commander Raja was giving his report directly to the Fleet Master via holo-drone in his personal chambers. "We have secured the vessel. The crew fought rather courageously, but the blessings of our gods saw us victory."

Rayta was distracted by a recently lingering thought. He quickly found the word he needed to speak, "Where there any humans aboard?"

The Commander bowed his head with his helmet tucked underneath his arm, "No, there were none. They used weapons like them though, and shields weaker than a demon's. Instead of humans, there were saurians and swollen beings in pressure suits defending the ship."

The Fleet Master calmly commanded, "Show me the body of one of these saurians."

The Commander flicked his hand to a pair of Kig-yar as they dragged the corpse by the arms. When it was within reach, the Commander grabbed the body by the head and fully displayed it for the Fleet Master to gaze upon. "My sub-commander informs me this one fought the most valiantly before falling to his blade." As shown by the two holes in his abdominal region.

As the body now hung up for the Fleet Master to see, he found it rather odd that Saren's people were on the ship he wanted attacked. As Rayta examined the body he asked the Commander, "How many of these saurians were there, Raja?"

The Commander quickly replied, "Twelve. The other eight were the

swollen beings. My men report they were not fighters. Not even worth comparing to the lowliest of Uggnoy." The Fleet Master was starting to have doubts as to why Saren needed them to do this if their defenses were as weak as the Commander informed him. As the Fleet Master stood there, the Commander couldn't help but notice his expression. "Rayta, something troubles you."

"Yes, but let us keep this between ourselves, for now. Commander, gather everything not bolted to the ship and a few corpses for study. We will vaporize that ship as soon as you and your men are back on board."

With that command the Commander saluted, fist to his breast plate and a bow of his head, as he answered, "By your word, Fleet Master."

* * *

><p>After another random slipspace jump, the subprowler had to cool off again. The 'director' had advised Dot to start transmitting a shortwave distress beacon in hopes of a passing UNSC ship might find them.<p>

Regrettably, their call for help was answered, but not by other humans. The voice had a strange echo behind it; even through the comm. channel they could hear it. Whatever this thing was, it didn't sound friendly. They didn't have time to wait for the slipspace capacitor before these things would probably be right on top of them and the Spartan was still out cold.

Cortez grabbed Dot's data crystal chip and placed it back into the Six's helmet. "As long as the Spartan has Dot, she'll be safe." Before they could have a chance to grab any of the weapons in the back, a ship appeared before them. The ship in question was shaped like a Y with the bottom of the letter as the nose. The design and the way it was crafted was more akin to human ships than that of the Covenant. The ship moved alongside them and extended an arm clasp onto them.

* * *

><p>With the arm secured on the strange ship, an investigation team was sent. But when they reach the end of the arm there was no hatch for them to open. "Captain, what should we do now? We can get in and they haven't responded to any of our hails."<p>

The captain of the ship wasn't certain but he wasn't going to forget his duty. "We'll have to find where the docking hatch is. And we can only assume their comms array is damaged. Come back. We'll look the ship over again."

After attaching the docking arm in two different sections, the lieutenant wasn't seeing any way in like this. "Captain, unless we have cutting torches we can't get in this way. Orders, sir."

The captain could only think of one thing, "Well whoever they are, we can't leave them out here like this. Inform the flotilla. Tell them we'll drag them to the one of our stations for medical treatment and questioning."

* * *

><p>Unending Resolve and the rest of the task force reappeared above the planet they met Saren. This time however, Fleet Master Rayta Nar 'Zaconomee planned to meet Saren personally. The Fleet Master brought a holo-drone with him for the Prophet of Pity, the Huragok from before for translation purposes, along with a pair of Mgalekgolo. Rayta also brought with him a corpse from the ship they had attack, along with many questions.<p>

* * *

><p>After receiving a transmission from their newâ€|'allies', Saren and his guard moved to meet them in the same place as the first encounter occurred. The same strange purple ship arrived and the strange bulbous creature was the first to disembark just like the last time. The gold armored warrior used the light again but he seemed to be carrying something in one of his hands. After the warrior had touched down onto the water, the purple ship turned its side to Saren as doors opened on the sides of the ship. The mid-section of the side deployed first with a gun turret on both manned by these stocky, mottled brown beings. The beings in question had some type of breathing apparatus on their face with an orange, pointed cone on their backs. But that wasn't what they should be worried about. As the doors around the gunners opened up, a pair of enormous blue armored creatures were seen inside the ship. Their bodies were covered in heavy blue colored armor and attached to their arms were shields and a heavy weapon of some type. Noticeably on their backs were a number of spikes that seemed capable of movement as demonstrated by one of these beings as it stared at Saren directly and made them quiver as the being prepared to jump out of the ship. As the two moved with the warrior, the right arms on the towering giants were the cannons, a metallic steel piece with a number of green tubes attached directly to it. But on their left arms the shield seemed to be welded onto their armor, just barely showing their three fingered hands. They now stood where they were before, as the two giants were in a ready position, hunched over with their shield arm across their mid-section and their cannon aimed at them.<p>

The warrior single handedly tossed a dead turian to Saren's feet, and he did not seem too pleased. The creature from before started to translate it all again for Saren and sent it via text onto Saren's omni-tool. 'You claimed you were doing this to help your 'people', but my men killed many of your kind in order to find your trinket! Explain this to me.'

Saren tried to explain, "You see, many of inhabitants of this the galaxy fear change, good or bad. I have found a select few who understand that change is necessary in order to progress. I have not told all of my people just those I know who would listen to reason."

The warrior seemed upset by this fact. As demonstrated by the translation, 'If you cannot trust them then they are not worthy of salvation. Only those committed can be saved by the gods.'

The warrior nodded to the bulbous creature as one of its tentacles released one of the silver orbs. A projection of the priest appeared now before them. The priest started to speak. 'We have done as you have asked. We have retrieved everything from the ship and present it

to you.'

Just as the priest finished speaking, two more purple dropships appeared through the cloud cover. Unlike the one that dropped off the warrior and his entourage, the dropships moved to a position behind Saren. The opening on the underside opened as objects were carefully lowered to the sand. After the first one was finished, the second ship moved in to pill its objects behind the first pill. Two of Saren's geth start to examine the pill as the other keep an eye on the warrior and his two 'guards'.

The geth found the object Saren wanted. It was a small device that nestled in the machine's hand. The rest seemed to be of little use to them as the one who found the device handed it off to Saren. Saren grabbed the small trinket and examined it for a few moments between his talons. Saren then bowed his head, "I thank you for this gesture of kindness. I'm certain this partnership will benefit us all."

The priest bowed his head courteously, 'As long as your promise is fulfilled, we will continue this cooperation.'

Saren seemed utterly pleased, "Good. I would like you to station yourselves here," Saren then displayed a hologram of the galaxy on his omni-tool, as he pointed with his free hand. "Few ever travel there and those who do are usually merchants or raiders. It would make a valuable strategic staging area if you are willing to assist us. I will send some of my geth to accompany you for communication purposes."

The warrior did not seem to agree, 'We will use our own people! We do not need help from you or your accursed machines!'

Saren provided him another one against it, "They can be used for near instant communication purposes as well as shock troopers. They will prove their worth when they are in great numbers. I will contact you through them when I need your aid once more."

* * *

><p>AN: **Now this stranded group of Covenant have 'allied' themselves with Saren. And no, sorry no Brutes on any of the ships, just Jackles, Grunts, Engineers, Hunters, and Elites. And the turians interfere with humans again.

5. Chapter 5

The new ship had taken them to a massive object in the middle of space. This strange object looked like an enormous tuning fork, or more accurately, a Covenant Energy Sword. There was a strange energy source at the center. It had a bright blue core that was confided between two slowly spinning rings. As they approached this unusual object the ship dragging them had aligned themselves alongside the object, with the two prongs the furthest position. Being so close to the object they could see the enormity of it. Even a UNSC supercarrier was dwarfed by this massive structure. As they were dragged along, bolts of blue lightning started to strike both craft as the two rings started to spin faster and faster. As more bolts struck, the other ship continued forward toward the prongs. Now the energy started to envelop them before suddenly being propelled. This

sudden burst of inertia lasted for a few moments as they were travelling through a strange Slipspace-like travel. Not even a minute past and they started to slow down.

Upon slowing down the humans saw more ships similar in design to the one dragging them. The station they were being pulled to was built like a fort; a lot of armor plating with a number of defensive turrets. The ship towing them brought them within one of the station's internal docks, a feature that didn't seem to be used often. Duvall and the others started to grab weapons as they could feel the ship touchdown against metal floor. Cortez and O'Brien relied on M7S Caseless Submachine Gun along with an M6C/SOCOM Automag magnum sidearm. Duvall and the Roger grabbed MA37 assault rifles and M6D Magnum sidearms. The humans would have liked to have the Spartan on their side but she was still out cold and she didn't look like she was going to wake any time soon.

Duvall took lead as he readied himself for whatever was to come. "Alright, troopers! I don't want anyone going gung ho on me! We don't open fire until we know the situation. Understood?"

"Sir!"

Cortez and O'Brien also responded, "Yes sir."

Opening the hatch, Duvall rushed out with the rifle at the ready followed by Roger and the ODSTs. Out in the open they were met by several aliens of the same race. They looked similar to Elites, but there were several discrepancies. They had the split-lip mandibles on their faces but only two mandibles along with a real jaw in between them, they only had three fingered hands, and their armor looked nothing like any Elite they had ever seen. They were also armed with weapons that looked more like heavily modified human weapons. Now one of the aliens was shouting in a language that was defiantly not Elite.

Duvall shouted, "Hold steadied."

Roger was getting nervous again, "Sergeant Major, I think we need to open fire."

Cortez didn't like this but agreed with Duvall, "No. Something else is going on here. They're not Covenant, but I'm not willing to surrender just yet."

* * *

><p>The captain on the station tried to reason with the four humans again as his men continued to keep them in their weapon sights. "I repeat, lay down your arms humans, and submit for inquiry."<p>

The four oddly armored humans did not respond to the captain again as they stood their ground. One of the lieutenants turned to his superior, "Sir, do you think it's possible that they can't understand us?"

The captain didn't like to think of such possibility but the lieutenant could be right. The captain tried again, "Lay down your arms, we won't harm you." The humans continued to hold their ground. "Lieutenant, fire a warning shot at them. Nothing drastic."

The dark scaled turian with red tattoos grabbed his pistol and took aim at one of the humans and fired at his foot. He fired a single round but instead of hitting a kinetic barrier, like it was supposed to, the shot made it into the human's foot. Seeing this, the lieutenant turned to the captain, "That wasn't supposed to happen."

* * *

><p>As Roger fell to the ground screaming in pain, Duvall moved to aid him as Cortez and O'Brien covered him. "Hang on trooper." Duvall started to examine the trooper's foot and found the metal slug had shattered against his boot. Some of shrapnel penetrated his boot, nearly severing one of his toes.<p>

O'Brien didn't like the look of Roger's toes, "So what's the plan now?"

Cortez could see the toe too, "Sergeant Major, I know we really shouldn't do this but, if they are willing to help, I think we should take it."

They had no doctor and the Spartan was not fit for combat. Duvall was reluctant but even with the medical supplies in the ship they would need a real doctor to help Roger. "Troopers, stand down." Duvall removed his weapons and discarded them away from himself. Now Duvall had his hands raised in the air as he shouted, "We surrender."

Cortez and O'Brien followed suit and carefully slide both weapons away from themselves and raised their hands in the air. These strange aliens moved in and took the weapons as others made Cortez, Duvall and O'Brien move. A group of the strange aliens started to huddle around Roger as they carefully moved him out.

A team of the aliens were sent into the ship to further investigate to find others inside. Unfortunately they did. The 'director' and Sierra-B312 were found by these unusual aliens. The 'director' did not put up any resistance against these new aliens. "I'm assuming you plan on interrogating me. I won't fight." The aliens then escorted the 'director' the few remaining tried to move Six in her full gear soon finding it difficult to transport this nearly half ton Spartan.

After being checked for weapons, the 'director' was reunited with Duvall and the others in holding cells. The marines were all stripped of their weapons and armor, leaving them only in their undersuits. After the 'director' was locked in next to the others. They started to speculate as to their fate. "So are they going to torture us first before they kill us or just space us as soon as they get the chance."

"Knock it off, O'Brien." Cortez knew they were in a dire situation but he was hoping for something, a miracle maybe.

The 'director' however seemed a bit more optimistic. "I think we should be more worried about how we are going to escape the station's external defenses."

Duvall turned to the 'director' curious about this optimism. "Why do you say that?"

"Our secret weapon. Sierra."

O'Brien and Cortez had new found respect for Spartans after the mission on Heian with Cal-141 but O'Brien failed to see how one Spartan, still asleep, was going to help. "I'm sorry 'director', but even if she was awake, how can she help us now?"

The 'director' calmly explained without getting their guard's attention, "Tell me, trooper, have you ever heard of the Insurrectionist on Mamore and Charybdis IX?"

O'Brien answered quietly, "Yeah, the UNSC send people in to quell them."

The 'director' quickly corrected that cover story, "By 'people' they meant her. She alone brought them and other groups down on her own, despite the fact that she was supposed to coordinate with a team. Sierra-312 has been rated as hyper-lethal. There's only one other being who has ever been rated that, the Master Chief."

Duvall added, "I've seen her fight. Even for a Spartan, she's more of a hyper-lethal vector than a soldier. Two Wraiths, three Ghosts, four Brute Chieftains, and the horde of Covies preventing us from activating the missile batteries in New Alexandria. If anyone could get us out of this she probably could."

* * *

><p>As one of the medical team tended to the human shot in the foot, another team tried to examine the half-ton suit and the being inside. Some of the technicians were discussing what was inside this strange armor, "I think it's batarian."<p>

"Really? A batarian with a bunch of humans? Besides, this looks nothing like batarian tech, it has to be one of their own."

"You don't think it's something else?"

"Why would it be? The only ones I've seen wear armor that heavy looking, besides our kind and humans, are krogans and it doesn't fit the body build. And no, I don't think it's an asari. Tell me when you've seen an asari wear armor heavier than medium class."

Their superior walked up behind both of them, "Are you two going to stand there talking all day or are you going to work?"

The two rushed off as the other turians moved to examine the armor. This armor was unlike any armor they had seen before. Most of the armor was a steel color with highlights of maroon on the arms, boots, knee guards, and helmet. The boots were severally worn, mud encrusted and dinged like the rest of the suit. The knee guards were separated between the boots and leg armor as it bent with her knee. On the armor's left thigh was a hard case of some type but it was sealed shut and could not be accessed at the moment. There was a strange electronic device attached to the left wrist, all of the data on it was in one of the human languages. The display on the device had a blue display as the rest of the casing matched the maroon color

highlighting the arm. On the chest piece were four black pouches, the largest of the pouches was directly below the head as two slimmer pouches hung on to the left side and a medium sized pouch was angled alongside the armor. Also on the chest piece the turians noticed a strange symbol on the left side, just below the combat knife's black guard. The symbol was a black bird with its wings spread open sitting on a globe with a ribbon spanning across the lower portion of the globe with the human letters of 'UNSC'. The shoulders were each unique, on the right shoulder was a small bandoleer with three actual bullets. It was odd to see such archaic technology on such a piece. After measuring each bullet they found they were 14.5 by 114mm. The left shoulder guard was shaped like an octagon with a small rectangular opening against the lower part of the arm. The shoulder piece was interesting but what caught their attention was an eight inch long curved blade strapped to it. The helmet was the strangest part of the suit. The helmet was rather boxy compared to most known helmets. A faded white strip ran down the right side of the face with a small diamond shape with an X crossing over it. There was a small gold colored lens that almost looked like an eye that was on the opposite side of the face to the white strip. There was a second cylinder shaped camera on the left side of the helmet as well. The 'face' was maroon while the back and jaw had the steel color like the body. Even with all of this protection on the armor, there were several scratches, burns of some type, and scrapings, but despite this it was obvious the armor has been maintained rather well overall.

* * *

><p>As these aliens continued to hover over Six, Dot continued to try and awaken the Spartan. "Noble Six, you need to awaken. Noble Six." Six finally started to awaken and Dot started up her helmet's camera and HUD. Dot then advised her, "Apologies Noble Six. I activated the lock-down systems once they had laid you on this table. I need you to remain still and calm. They seem to believe you are still unconscious." Now with her vision back, Six could see what they were.<p>

_These aliens, they don't look like any Covenant race I've ever fought or heard of, but those mandibles look like Elites. _As Dot lowered the density of the hydrostatic gel layer, Six noticed something she wasn't expecting, _I don't feel any restraints on my wrists or ankles. _Her shields were still active so she didn't have to charge those or worry about showing that she's awake. With the motion sensor activated Six could now see how many of these aliens she was dealing with. _The motion sensor detects seven things; one above my head, three at my feet and two to my sides. The last one's about ten meters away to my right, most likely near the exit._

Dot calculated everything Six was thinking and planning. Her plan could be executed properly thanks to her augmentations and training but it is the alien factors that are unknown variable and Dot let Six know, "Noble Six. Your plan is mathematically sound. The only factors that are currently unknown are how they will react when you execute your plan. Are you ready?"

Now all Six had to do was wait for the right opportunity to appear, and she wouldn't have to wait long. The one above her head seemed to move in to try and remove her helmet off her head. Without restraints, Six's readied herself for the move. She had to keep her eyes on the

motion tracker making sure the three at her feet were still there. As the alien was about to grab a hold of her helmet, Six immediately grabbed the sides of the table and lunged at two of the aliens at her feet. Almost killing the two with the weight of the armor, Six quickly pulled out Emile's kukri as she grabbed the third alien's left arm and pulled it behind his back and carefully placed the curved part of the kukri against his uvula. This action only took the Spartan about five seconds from when she launched herself off the table, slightly slower because she was still fighting off the effects of the drugs from before.

Now the guard had a strange assault rifle like weapon trained on them. Six positioned herself behind the alien so most of her body was behind it and her combat knife was out of anyone's reach, especially her captive. She continued to walk her hostage away from the others as she carefully positioned them in front of the door. Unlike Elites, this one doesn't seem ready to die as it continued to shout, both at her and the one with the weapon. Six twisted her hostage's arm a bit to make him open the door as she continued to keep him between her and the guard.

* * *

><p>When the thing grabbed the assistant, he had told them to hold their fire, even though he had little authority over the guard. As it continued this 'dance' with the guard around the room until they were next to the door. The assistant could feel the strength it possessed. The turian couldn't help but let out a scream of pain as it twisted his arm slightly. "Ahhh! Do you have to do that?" Without hesitation he opened the door for it, "There see? I'm cooperating. Now if you'd just let me goâ€¦|" This one wasn't releasing the grip it had on him as it pulled the assistant with it out the door.<p>

It continued to hold the assistant hostage as they moved on. They moved through the station and it would occasionally pull off to the side when others were moving through. During these occasional stops, it seemed to be conversing with someone but it wasn't talking, just a few strange and subtle head movements.

* * *

><p>Entering an empty room, Six grabbed articles of clothing and tied her hostage's arms together. Six kept her eye on the hostage as she discussed things privately with Dot. "We need to find the others."<p>

Dot agreed, "We will need a map of this facility."

Six looked around the room and found a computer terminal. The oddity was it looked similar to the one Six witness Carter using to communicate with Colonel Holland when she first met Noble team. Six pulled Dot's data chip out of her helmet and found a slot that fit the chip perfectly. The console came alive with Dot's constantly changing grid pattern of blue lights. Before Dot was removed, Six advised her to signal when she was finished by using her patterns. Dot did, as her display flashed from the left of the screen to the right. Six immediately grabbed the data chip and reinserted it into the back of her helmet.

Six turned to her prisoner as Dot displayed a map of the station on

the upper right portion of her visor. Dot then identified where she was relative to the others. The director and most of the troopers were about four levels below them, another was isolated on the same level as they were and the ship was one level up. Six then asked, "I'm assuming you had to download their language?"

"Affirmative." Dot then professed, "It was unusually easy to acquire the data. It was as if they wanted it to be found."

Six then had a thought, "Dot, replay what he said when I captured him and translate."

'Don't shoot! Don't shoot! Ahhh! Do you have to do that? There see? I'm cooperating. Now if you'd just let me goâ€¦|'

Six could only see more and more differences between these aliens and the Elites she has fought against. Six couldn't risk having the extra baggage slow her down but she could just let him go either. Six grabbed the alien's head. As it tried to talk her out of it, she placed it in a sleeper hold and gently squeezed until it the lack of blood cause it to fall unconscious. After leaving the room Dot helped lock down the door so no one would accidentally stumble upon the hostage or it couldn't alert the others.

* * *

><p>AN: **OK for those who don't know the armor config from the description from above I'll list it here:

FJ/PARA knee guard, TACTIAL/HARD CASE, TACPAD, Tactical/Recon(chest piece), GUNGNIR HU/RS(helmet), Sniper variant(right shoulder), UA/Multi-Threat(left shoulder)

or for those who prefer seeing the armor visually here's the link(minus the spacing and brakets):

www . bungle(.net)/ stats / reach / playermodel .
ashx?rpis=TWxTzCOD2EvRIixo8VjqcQ==

6. Chapter 6

As Cortez was looking around the stockade trying to find a way to get out, a strange banging started to come from the other side of the area. At first the guard seemed to ignore it but as the banging continued the guard moved to investigate. Like a shadow the Spartan appeared and hit the guard in the back of the head, knocking out the alien. She grabbed the weapons and card key off the guard and dragged the body into a cell where she locked it in. As Six moved to their cells she unlocked everyone's door but the director's. From the perspective of the others, she seemed hesitant or was unwilling to do it.

Duvall grabbed the card from her and unlocked the door. "We need to find Roger and our gear."

Dot gave Duvall the information, "Sergeant Major, Roger is in an emergency room four levels up. Your weapons and armor have been placed within the armory three rooms over. The ship is being held within the hangar a level above Roger."

Cortez tried to plan this out so they didn't say in this place too long, "So our first priority should be getting our gear since its closer. After that we can rescue the trooper then we head for the ship and hope she's still flight worthy."

There wasn't many options open for them, as Duvall agreed, "Sounds like a plan."

Led by Six, the group snuck their way to the armory, stopping only to let a few patrols pass through. The door to the armory was locked and there was no visible key hole to pick. The director moved to investigate. "Hmmmâ€¦ It seems they use electronic locking mechanisms. We might be able to hotwire this."

Six pulled out her combat knife as she pried open a panel next to the door. She handed the blade to Cortez as she kept an eye out for more of these aliens. Cortez cut a few wires and the door eventually opened. They all moved away from the door expecting company inside but there wasn't a single alien inside. Almost immediately after entering they found their gear and started to put their armor back on as Six continued as look out. After a few minutes to gear up, everyone was ready to go, the director in Rodger's armor and Duvall handed him an M6G magnum, and they moved to find him and the ship.

* * *

><p>Security started to get much tighter than before, it seemed they discovered the others had escaped as well. They had a few close calls, and without the Spartan's speed and reaction time, they would have been caught. They had locked the few aliens in closets and a room they had past. They eventually found where they had Roger as he was strapped to a table while the aliens applied a strange gel like substance to his foot.<p>

"What is that?"

Duvall didn't care, "I don't know, but we're gettin' him out."

Opening the door, they walked with their weapons at the ready. Six easily took the guard down and knocked it unconscious. With the only armed down, the other aliens started to back away. Cortez and O'Brien took aim at the alien as Duvall and the director assisted Roger. Duvall and the director took Roger by the arms as Duvall told him, "Come on trooper, we're getting ourselves out of here."

With little need for secrecy now, Six grabbed the unconscious guard as a precaution. They slowly backed out of the room and sealed the other aliens inside. As the elevator reached the hangar they were welcomed by a full company of aliens with weapons at the ready. Several of them had assault rifles of some type while others had shotguns or sniper rifles targeted at them. Six pushed herself to the front, ensuring they could see the hostage she had.

The decorated alien watched from an observation deck within the hangar when he signaled to all of them to stand down. With that signal, the humans slowly moved to their ship as they continued to watch the many eyes following them. First ones in were the director, Duvall and Roger, next were Cortez and O'Brien. Six walked up the

ramp and turned to one of the snipers above her. She slowly released her grip on the, now conscious, guard as she let him walk away. With the alien gone, she backed into the ship and the ramp closed. Six ran to the cockpit as she prepped the ship for immediate departure.

* * *

><p>With the hostage secured, the captain immediately ordered the hangar to be locked down before the ship had a chance to flee. Unfortunately moving the hostage had given them enough time as the ship flew out of the hangar. "All ships within the immediate vicinity, an unauthorized launch has occurred and you are to capture this unidentified vessel. Repeat, capture and return the unidentified vessel ASAP!"<p>

* * *

><p>Six was pushing the ship as she tried to reach the SSEP, a number of fighter-class ships started to pursue them. Regrettably the subprowler could not use its stealth systems while the Slipspace capacitor was activated. This prompted Dot to advise the Spartan, "Recommend evasive maneuvers until the Slipspace capacitor is ready to engage."<p>

Six could only thought how redundant of a statement that was as she continued to do that even before Dot said a thing. She was a great pilot, but the Black Cat was no Saber, the alien ships were catching up to them and she knew it. Six just needed to delay them for a few more seconds as the capacitor charged up. The small group of fighters was soon followed by a frigate. As the fighters tried to coral them, Six did a daring maneuver to get past them. It worked, but they hit one of the fighters, clipping its wing. With the frigate, now delayed as they tried to pull the ship in, all that was left was the fighters.

The capacitor was now ready to use, but the fighters were keeping a tight formation keeping them away from a certain sector of space. Without hesitation, Six activated the slipspace drive and jumped away from the system. Unlike the last time with the Covenant, there was no slipspace wake for them to traverse, and no way for them to follow.

* * *

><p>As the Black Cat continued through the darkness of slipspace travel, Six pulled Dot out of her head and into the subprowler's computers so she could have a 'chat' with the director. Six was tempted to strike him but she maintained her cool as she instead asked, "Director. Why did you drug me?"<p>

"What?"

The director continued to remain calm, despite being surrounded by all the marines. He knew there was no point in lying to her face, "Alright, you want to know why? I worked with Catherine on the SPARTAN-II project. I remembered every Spartan we conscripted for the program and Catherine told me about Noble Team. Other than Jorge, all members of Noble Team were unknown to her. She informed me of her encounter at SWORD base, we looked through classified ONI files and found a few interesting tidbits. It was somehow connected with

Colonel James Ackerson. I was hoping to have returned to UNSC space so I may speak with you in private."

O'Brien was now tempted to hit the director as he shot up from his seat, "So the only reason we were in that situation was because you knocked her out!"

Before Six or the director could speak again, the alarms went off as Dot alerted them, "Warning: Power irregularities are disrupting ship systems. Forcing an immediate exit from slipspace."

After the sudden shift from slipspace to normal space Six climbed back up to the cockpit to take control. Six pulled Dot out and placed the AI back into her suit. Just as she started to check the systems, a strange ship appeared to them. The ship seemed human in design but it didn't look like anything known to have been created by humans. The ship was long and flat, probably a cargo ship or transport. There were no visible armaments on the craft and they soon saw why it didn't need them, a small group of snubfighters appeared from the ship's 'shadow'. Soon an open hail was received from the transport. "If you want to escape the turians, follow us."

The voice spoke English, and that was enough for them to believe they were humans, for the time being. The group led them to another of the large metal objects in space. This was Six's first encounter of this strange object but Dot assured her that it would be fine. Their 'escort' then asked for their mass, of which Dot provided. They were told to follow them as they made their approach to the massive object. The transit took mere seconds before arriving to a new location. Their new 'friends' had given them coordinates for a station they were heading.

* * *

><p>They arrived to the new star system before their escorts. The coordinates directed them to a strange space station that looked like a flattened bow with a distinguishing protrusion along the 'string' that slightly resembled the tower of SWORD base. There were several other protrusions, such as antennas and panels, but the overall shape and size of the station was unusual. Six held their position, staying away from the station as they waited for their escorts to arrive. It took about two minutes, but the other ships soon arrived, escorting them through the defenses.<p>

Six followed their escort to an internal docking area within the station. From the viewports they could see more humans working, a good sign to be certain. Six grabbed Dot and a DMR as the others also grabbed their weapon of choice. They left the ship and saw even more humans in uniforms of white orange and black, an unusual group of colors. Security didn't seem to mind they had weapons as Six and the others were led down a hallway. The hallway eventually led to a small break room with an elaborate view of the stars. One of the humans in full combat armor directed them to a stairway, "Our boss would like to speak with you all."

At the bottom of the staircase was a small dark room with a circle on the floor. Even without the night vision built into her helmet, Six could see the room was barely going to hold them. As they walked into the circle, an orange hologram that started to rise up from the floor as it scanned them.

As they continued to look around as thing started to appear that wasn't in the small dark room, a man sitting in a small chair with a very neatly worn suit greeted them with a puff of his cigarette, "Welcome. I believe introductions are in order. I am the leader of an organization called Cerberus. You can call me the Illusive Man."

The director was interested, "An interesting choice for the name of your 'organization'. Tell me, it is called Cerberus because you protect or guard something, or did you simply use the ancient Roman name because of what it's attached to?"

The Illusive Man tapped the end of his cigarette into the ash tray attached to the chair's arm. "Cerberus stands to guard the interests of humanity," yet he smiled as he added, "but you could say there is some symbolism behind it as well."

Roger wasn't as concerned about that, more so about their recent encounter, "Ok, so you're human. But what in god's name were those things that found us first? The fangs on the sides of their faces, and the scales made them look like Elites."

The Illusive Man paused to take a puff from his cigarette before he answered the Lance Corporal, "I don't know what an 'Elite' is, but what you are describing sounds like a turian." The Illusive Man started to press a few buttons on his chair's arm as holographic panels appeared before him. He then started to press a series of buttons from the holo display before a hologram of an unarmored turian appeared before them. "About twenty-six years ago, they were the first alien species encountered by humanityâ€|and we were at war with them, for a brief time."

O'Brien didn't seem to agree with the Illusive Man's answer, "Look pal, I don't know what rock you've been hiding under, but don't confuse information here! We've been fighting for the past two decades. I think we know who were fighting."

The director stepped in as he apologized, "Do forgive him, but he is correct." The director paused, "We've been at war for the past twenty-seven years now, against a coalition of aliens known simply as the Covenant. They declared war against humanity and have since systematically wiped out colony after colony. It seems odd that our history seems to differ greatly, wouldn't you agree, Illusive Man."

The Illusive Man took another puff of smoke before replying, "It is indeed. Just from the look of you six it is apparent your technology is completely different from the norm. This is why I'd like to propose we should collaborate for the time being."

The group looked to one another, except for the director. The director soon spoke out, "It would be foolish to enter a partnership with anyone without knowing more about them. For now though, I don't see any harm in cooperating. Does anyone have any objections?"

No one seemed unwilling, though Six had mixed feeling about working with the director any further but she was willing to swallow those feelings, for now. The Illusive Man was pleased nether the less, "Excellent. There are things we need to go over before we can launch any co-operations, but I'm certain this will be the beginning of a

beautiful partnership."

* * *

><p>While the director started to get friendly with the Illusive Man, Six and the others were being evaluated by a prominent Cerberus personnel, Miranda Lawson. "I'm rather impressed Six, not many could score as well as you have, even without that heavy armor of yours. Your friends, Cortez and O'Brien, they are also scoring well above the standard for the Alliance."<p>

Six continued to ignore Miranda's comments, despite being complementary compared to her initial assessment of her. O'Brien on the other hand was willing to indulge the Cerberus officer, "Well not many can survive a Covenant assault. Only the best of the best get to where we are."

Miranda stared at O'Brien, looking at him with disgust and contempt toward the ODST. "Now for the final test: combat exercises, first against combat drones then live targets."

Six volunteered to test first, armed with only a Harpy pistol provided by Cerberus personnel and her combat knives. The combat scenario was an invading force that has captured a colony. Six's objective was to take out the invaders and save as many civilians as possible. Six planned to push her objective even further, restricting herself to silently eliminate her targets. The horn roared to signal the start. Six quickly took cover inside one of the buildings as she quietly surveyed the colony. Dot helped identify the civilian targets while highlighting hostiles.

Six fell back and started to eliminate patrols and the outer perimeter guards with her combat knife and the kukri. Miranda seemed to be in control of the drones as they started to respond to the changing situations while continuing to maintain her unidentified status to the enemy. Now the combat drones were gathering near the hostages, yet Six and Dot were able to pick out a few more drones she could eliminate without drawing too much attention. Now all that was left were three hostile units and they were keeping close to the hostages.

Six privately asked for assistance from Dot, "Dot analyzed the mechs. Are they susceptible to flashbangs?"

Dot began to evaluate the capabilities of the machine and its weaknesses. "Analysis complete. These LOKI combat drones can be affected by sudden change to the light spectrum within a short amount of time."

Six thought to herself, _A simple 'yes' would have sufficed._

Dot immediately responded to her qualm, "Apologies Noble Six, I will attempt to better adjust myself to satisfy you during true combat situations." Six still wasn't use to the fact that Dot had access to her mind and very thoughts without having to voice them.

Six grabbed the pistol she was given along with a flashbang as she tried to think of how to pull this off. As the hostile drones turned away from the building Six was in for a moment. The grenade rolled to the feet of the machines before blinding all of the combat drones.

Dot estimated the effects would last for five seconds at most. Six fired a single round at the three hostile units, taking each one down before they knew she was there. Six then fire one round into one of the 'civilians', a disguised hostile Dot was able to discriminate it as it turned hostile before Six engaged. With all targets eliminated the simulation ended, but Six now saw she had to watch her back as well as the others if they were to survive what she believed Cerberus might be willing to do.

* * *

><p>Two months had passed since that day they first met with the Illusive Man. Six continued to carry Dot in her suit while leading the others on various operations. The others had been outfitted with this universe's kinetic barrier technology to add an extra layer of protection for them during firefights. Most of their weapons were retrofitted with heat sink technology this universe used. With Dot's assistance however, Six had modified and 'improved' the DMR she used so she could change the sinks just as when it used actual bullets and clips.<p>

The director has been working closely with the Illusive Man in their attempt to duplicate the Slipspace drive and mass produce them. So far there hasn't been much success; limited only by the fact that the director was not familiar with the construction of a Slipspace drive and the insistence from ship engineers of the need of a drive core. For the time being Six and the others have been using UT-47 Kodiak shuttles and other ships to get to their destinations and complete operations.

The more they explored the galaxy, the more negative rumors they heard about Cerberus, a terrorist organization as many have claimed it to be. Six hadn't seen anything to believe the rumors, but that didn't mean there weren't parts of the organization she had seen and she knew it. In many ways Cerberus is just like ONI, but unlike ONI they aren't apart of Earth's normal military, or any part of Earth's chain of command. This was the primary factor that Six had trouble agreeing with, so too did Cortez but the two of them kept this information from the others, for the time being. Currently they were sent to deal with a group of pirates that planned a raid on one of the nearby human colonies.

7. Chapter 7

Five and a half cycles had passed since Fleet Master Rayta and his task force had encountered Saren and his geth. They had been sent on simple missions, missions unworthy of most of his men, especially the Special Operations division. They continued to maintain their presence a secret from the known galaxy but some of crew were starting to get aggressive, in particular the Kig-yar and some of the younger Sangheili who had yet to prove themselves in a true battle. During this time thought they have continued to try and reestablish communication with High Charity but still to no avail. Even so, Rayta occasionally sent teams to try and find the humans that have eluded them for so long but still no signs of the ship or of any demon. The Prophet of Pity seemed to have become enticed by the geth, spending more and more time speaking with Saren alone in his chambers, and slowly replacing his Honor Guards with geth.

This slow, but evident, change of guard has left many worried but none more so than Sork 'Tasuvai, the only Light of Sanghelios with them. Sork had started to become more vocal when the geth were given the duty of the Sangheili Honor Guardsmen. Pity often disregarded the Light of Sanghelios but would occasionally call him out, claiming heresy against the Honor Guard Ultra. Many within the fleet knew Sork was no heretic, but Pity's continued actions might say otherwise. The Prophet of Pity has invited the other San 'Shyuum to join him in his chambers and each came out slightly different from when they entered. Though only a few Sangheili noticed the change, Rayta and Sork in particular. Pity has even started to step on Fleet Master Rayta Nar 'Zaconomee's toes, undermining his commands and even contradicting them at times to aid Saren. Rayta had abided to these commands but had to remind the Prophet that he was in charge. The geth assured them that Sovereign would be capable of doing it. With that Rayta ordered a small division, lead b Raja 'Locomee to take Shipmistress Chur'R-Zer's raider to take them to the planet.

Rayta was able to find Raja before he had gone off to the hangar. "Commander, I plan to join you and your men on this one."

Raja was unprepared for this, "Sir, I'm not sure ifâ€|"

Rayta grabbed an empty helmet as he stated, "I will adorn the same armor as you and your men. I am merely put my skills as a fighter to better use."

Raja bowed, "It will be an honor to fight alongside you, Fleet Master."

Donned in the full armor of a Special Operations Sangheili many of the others did not know who he really was. With the ground forces assembled within the Kig-yar ship, the hangar was cleared of personnel as the barrier was lowered for them to leave the ship. Unending Resolve had moved closer to a Mass Relay so the Kig-yar ship didn't have to worry about traveling to a different star system. The few geth allowed on board were working to prepare the ship for the transit to the human colony called Eden Prime.

* * *

><p>As the SSV Normandy flew its shakedown run to the colony Eden Prime, they had received a transmission from the colony. The screen was displayed for the captain, his XO and a turian Spectre to view. The transmission started with an Alliance troopers fighting off something. Blue and green bolt could be seen searing the air as they flew as more projectiles flew at them. A female human in white and pink armor was in view and ran toward the camera as she shouted at the man, "Get down!" She knocked him over as she opened fire on targets, unfortunately the camera continued to look at her. Explosions started to happen all around as the camera tried to capture everything.<p>

One of the men ran to the screen as he reported, "We are under attack! Taking heavy casualties. We can't...argh!" An explosion happens inches away from him as he huddled until the explosion died down. He tried to continue, "-eed evac! They came out of nowhere. We need-" Suddenly a bright light had forced its way through the man's chest and armor. As the camera pulled back, a strange fully armored being suddenly materialized behind the man. The armor was like

nothing anyone had seen before, the helmet had two protrusions that looked like tusks, and the hand had two opposable digits out of four; one where the thumb is normally and the other was at bottom of the palm. The armor had a maroon color as the being towered the human and it easily lift the fully geared soldier with just one arm. Suddenly more beings in similar armor configuration started to appear out of nowhere behind the first one, only one had the same colors as the others were clad in jet-black. Without warning they started to use strange looking weapons that fired slow blue projectiles. Each shot seared and burned the air and anything else they touched.

From the flank, short grey colored creatures with strange breathing apparatuses started to move forward throwing blue fuzzes as other continued to fire their odd looking weapons that shot green projectiles and ugly featherless tan bird-things with razor-sharp teeth and purple shields on their right arm pushed forward also firing the same green projectile weapon as the grey creatures were. Another commonality the two new aliens had was that they were outfitted in jet-black armor, similar to the tall fully armored ones. As these things continued to fight, off to the distance, something had caught the attention of the humans. This thing was so unusual they stopped fighting for a moment as they stared, awe struck. When the camera finally turned to see, it was a massive ship that almost looked like a hand, reaching down onto the planet wanting to grab something. As it descended through the planet's atmosphere, sparks of red 'lightening' originated from the ship. But this pause would prove fatal, as more explosions started to occur around them, as the humans tried to flee, the camera started to shake about before falling to the ground and suddenly being cut off.

* * *

><p>As the humans retreated, Commander Raja approached Rayta, "Fleet Master, they flee like cowards. Shall we pursue?"<p>

"No." Before Raja could ask why Rayta explained, "This is Saren's fight. The geth will give chase. We merely need to keep them away from the relic until he acquires what he needs." Rayta then started to give orders, "Commander, you and the others return to the relic and ensure Saren does what he came here to do. I will patrol this area once more before returning. If Saren has concluded his business by the time I return, we will leave this planet."

Raja bowed, "Yes Fleet Master." He raised his head as he said, "At least take a few Uggnoy with you."

Rayta wanted to be alone for a bit but he was willing to have some backup, even if it was from them, "You four!" Rayta pointed out a file, "Follow me." The Uggnoy followed as Rayta walked off to the opposite direction from the others.

* * *

><p>But that transmission had also found its way to the Illusive Man. As the director watched with him, he couldn't help but ask, "I thought you said the Covenant doesn't exist here?"<p>

The Illusive Man took another puff from his cigarette as he replied, "They don't. I've given you dossiers on all known space-faring species. There is no collective of aliens similar to the group you

called the Covenant."

The director then noted, "It's fortunate that Six and the others are not that far away." He sent them a message advising they immediately stop their current operation in order to intervene on a nearby colony. He used the only word he needed to convince them; Covenant.

* * *

><p>As the UT-47 Kodiak drop shuttle touched down on the planet, O'Brien couldn't see any Covenant ship above the colony. "I don't get it, Cortez. If the Covenant are attacking, then where are the ships?"<p>

Cortez was putting his helmet on as he replied, "It's possible this is only the beginning of an invasion."

Dot then provided more information, "Master Sergeant, my current database does not cover known Covenant tactics on such small scale assault. It is also possible they are the only survivors that tried to follow us. Without more data nothing can be determined at the moment."

Duvall added, "Well whatever they want we're not letting them get it."

Six led the team through the remains of the colony, finding many charred remains of humans, a sight seen by my present company before. Six then stopped. She raised her left hand in a fist. After a second of pausing, her fist opened as she spread her fingers. The other took cover immediately behind buildings and whatever seemed stable. Six aimed her DMR as she found what she had spotted. It was a strange machine that was floating in the air. They were small but they obviously had guns attached to them. Six then signaled to O'Brien to join her in a sniping session. Six slowly and quietly got down to her knees as O'Brien switched his suppressed SMG for the 99D Anti-MatÃ©riel sniper rifle slung on his back. Six then counted down to O'Brien from three. The two sharpshooters hit their marks, as both units were hit and fell to the ground. Regrettably more drones had flanked them as they opened fire on Duvall and Roger, ripping through their kinetic barriers. Cortez, O'Brien and Six immediately turned around and shot down the attackers, but not before losing the two troopers.

With the area clear, the team moved to check on the troopers. Cortez checked their pulses, "Their goneâ€|" Six was upset at this, the fact that Duvall and Roger died under her command and the fact that she might have been able to do something to save them. But Cortez put it in words for her, "Come on, we still have a colony to save. Grab their tags and gear, let's keep moving."

Six had almost forgotten she was still carrying Jorge's tags still in one of her pouches as she placed a hand against the pouch. She watched as O'Brien and Cortez grabbed the dog tags and closed their eyes. Six grabbed Duvall's MA37 and attached it to the back of her armor as the ODSTs grabbed their pistols. Cortez then grabbed Roger's MA37. O'Brien turned to Cortez, "What were those things?"

"I don't know. We can't contact the director or the Illusive Man so

we can't get any Intel. The best thing we can do is keep going. Isn't that right, Six?"

Sierra-312 simply nodded as she examined the remains of the drones.

* * *

><p>Rayta had managed to confuse and lose his file, but made sure the lead Uggnoy knew if they should lose sight of Rayta to instead return to the others. As he continued the Sangheili found a recently uncovered site. This must be the place the relic was uncovered. Before he could investigate further, he heard the sounds of battle as weapons fire rang out in the air. Rayta activated his armor's active camouflage to investigate. Rayta stumbled upon a human in white and pink armor, _One of the humans that retreated from battle._ He also found two geth as they had laid a human on a small pedestal. The human wasn't a fighter as it didn't have armor or a weapon. As the human continued to bleed on the pedestal, the geth seemed to be preparing the human for something. Suddenly a spike roughly three meters high protruded from the pedestal and through the human's back and out its chest. Rayta let out a loud roar as he grabbed his Energy Sword. The human soldier's retreat had grabbed the geth's attention as the enraged Sangheili quickly ran up to the two machines as he sliced the closest one in two from the abdomen. Rayta then kicked the other one to the floor and pinned under hoof-shaped foot. He ended the last machine with a quick jab into the tub that was anatomically positioned like the spinal column.

As his rage subsided, he turned his attention to the human from before. The female had taken cover behind the rocks nearby. Before he could do anything else, Rayta spotted two more humans in grey armor approaching. One of the new humans' armor was different, it had a red strip on its helmet and right arm. Rayta had no quarrel with these humans, for now. Knowing all too well of human persistence, they would attempt the retake the colony from the geth. Rayta activated his active camo and returned to the spaceport to rejoin the others.

* * *

><p>Soon Six and the ODSTs spotted more machines, three of them patrolling around a burning building. Unlike the small drones from before, these ones were humanoid in size and form. Three fingered hands, an oddly bent knees and a large light for a face. Dot immediately chimed in, "Noble Six, data provided by the Illusive Man would suggest these automatons are geth."<p>

"Geth?"

Cortez answered O'Brien, who hadn't studied up on the galactic history, "Creations of an alien race called quarrians. They accidentally made them smart enough to think for themselves and tried to destroy them only to lose every world they controlled. After that no one had heard from the geth for almost three hundred years, at least that's what the data said."

Six pulled out her combat knife and handed it off to O'Brien. She signaled to them to take the patrol out quietly. Quietly, the three of them moved closer to the machines and each one was taken out

without alerting the others. O'Brien jabbed the combat knife into the spine of the geth as he tore into it. Six used Emile's kukri as it sliced the head off with her incredible Spartan strength. Cortez used his suppressed SMG as he shot it repeatedly in the back at pointblank range. O'Brien handed the knife back to Six after she cleaned and sheathed the kukri.

Six heard rustling behind her as her motion tracker detected something coming. She turned her DMR on the sound. It was a group of humans. Three, a woman in white and pink armor, a man in all grey armor and a woman in grey armor with red strip down her helmet and right arm she also had a small insignia on her right breastplate reading 'N7' with a small red right triangle next to the seven.

The three humans had also raised their weapons on them when they spotted them. Six communicated with the ODSTs via helmet channels. "Stand down. They're humans." With that, Six and the ODSTs lowered their weapons first.

The woman in white asked, "Who are you three? I've never seen you around here before. And you're defiantly not Alliance."

O'Brien turned to the others, "So what do we tell them?"

Cortez stepped forward, "The truth." He started to speak to them, "Master Sergeant Cortez of UNSC's 105th Shock Trooper Division. We've been sent to quell the Covenant threat."

Something wasn't adding up to the three strangers. The man asked Cortez, "What is the UNSC? And what's a Covenant?"

O'Brien was a bit blunt as he said, "Those alien bastards you've been fighting are the Covenant."

Six started to walk away when the outstanding woman with the red strips asked them, "How did you get here?"

Six stopped as she replied, "It doesn't matter. What matters is keeping the colony and the colonists safe."

Cortez nodded, "She's right. If we don't destroy the Covenant ship before they leave, we might have bigger problems than this."

The woman in white asked, "How could it get worse?"

The three didn't even need to look as they simultaneously said, "Glassing." Cortez continued, "Covenant forces find, attack, and glass human worlds. Let's hope we can stop them before it gets that far."

Continuing into the area the soldier in the white and pink armor commented, "Looks like they hit the camp hard."

The man warned, "It's a good place for an ambush. Keep your guard up." Six saw three strange spikes with cybernetic humans skewered on them, as though they were left they for a warning. As they moved closer one of the spikes lowered as the cyber-human started to move. The man shouted, "Oh, god! They're still alive!"

The woman then shouted, "What did the geth do to them?" The thing had

detached itself from the pedestal as it started to run toward them. Six wasn't taking chances as the moaning creature was heading straight for her. Six opened fire with her DMR five times, two to deal with the kinetic barrier and the other three placed into the head. The creature didn't try to defend itself as it ran into the shots. But the creature continued to charge at Six. She placed a few more shot into it but the body had started glowing before collapsing to the floor. As it slumped to the ground the thing released an energy pulse, causing similar affects like an EMP on her armor. Six had to fall back a bit until her systems could reboot. Six then recalled the notes she had found on the subprowler. _These things can't be a coincidence._

The other two creatures soon lowered from their spikes, forcing the others to take them down. After the fighting her HUD and camera returned as she surveyed the area. O'Brien was getting a closer look at the things when Six grabbed his shoulder. Cortez was looking at one of the bungalows when he found one of them was locked. "I think we've got survivors!"

The team moved to investigate when the man from the new group activated his omni-tool. "Got it."

Cortez signaled to O'Brien as the two ODST troopers readied their SMGs. With a nod, Cortez opened the door and the two rushed in. A woman in a lab coat was relieved, despite weapons being aimed at her. "Humans! Thank the Maker!"

A man in a similar outfit as the woman appeared from out of the shadows, "Hurry! Close the door! Before they come back!"

* * *

><p>Shepard and his team moved into the shed as the other three kept watch outside, "Don't worry. We'll protect you."<p>

The woman thanked them, "Thank you. I think we'll be okay now. It looks like everyone's gone."

Williams then commented, "You're Dr. Warren, the one in charge of the excavation." She then asked the doctor, "Do you know what happened to the beacon?"

Warren answered, "It was moved to the spaceport this morning. Manuel and I stayed behind to help pack up the camp. When the attack came, the marines held them off long enough for us to hide. They have their lives to save us."

Manuel then started to rave, "No one is saved. The age of humanity is ended. Soon, only ruin and corpses will remain."

Shepard asked Dr. Warren about the attack, "What else can you tell me about the attack?"

Warren tried to remember, "It all happened so fast. One second we were gathering up our equipment. The next we were hiding in the shed while the geth swarmed over the camp."

Manuel continued to add on with his strange ramblings, "Agents of the destroyers. Bringers of darkness. Heralds of our extinction."

Warren continued, "We could hear the battle outside. Gunfire. Screams. I thought it would never end. Then, everything went quiet. We just sat there, too afraid to move. Until you came along."

Shepard hoped she might have seen Nihlus, "Did you notice a turian in the area?"

Manuel spoke out, "I saw him. The prophet. Leader of the enemy. He was here, before the attack."

Alenko commented, "That's impossible. Nihlus was with us on the Normandy before the attack. He couldn't have been here."

Warren apologized for Manuel's behavior, "I'm sorry. Manuel's still a bit unsettled. We haven't seen your turian. We've been hiding in here since the attack."

Shepard was hoping the doctor could give him more information about the beacon, "Can you tell me anything about the beacon?"

Warren gladly answered, "It's some type of data module from a galaxy-wide communications network. Remarkably well-preserved. It could be the greatest scientific discovery of our lifetime. Miraculous new technologies. Groundbreaking medical advances. Who knows what secrets are locked inside?" She had that joy of a child in a toy shop as she thought about the possibilities.

Manuel however had a more radical view, "We have unearthed the heart of evil. Awakened the beast. Unleashed the darkness."

Warren turned to Manuel, "Manuel! Please! This isn't the time."

Shepard finally asked Warren, "What's wrong with your assistant?"

Warren tried to explain, "Manuel has a brilliant mind, but he's always been a bit unstable. Genius and madness are two sides of the same coin."

Manuel didn't seem to agree, "Is it madness to see the future? To see the destruction rushing toward us? To understand there is no escape? No hope? No, I am not mad. I'm the only sane one left!"

Warren tried to assure Shepard, "I gave him an extra dose of his meds after the attack."

Shepard turned to the gunnery chief, "Williams, take us to the spaceport."

Manuel started to tell them before they left the shed, "You can't stop it. Nobody can stop it. Night is falling. The darkness of eternity."

Warren grabbed Manuel's arm, "Hush, Manuel. Go lie down. You'll feel better once the medication kicks in," leading the man to one of the beds behind them.

8. Chapter 8

Near the monorail, Nihlus had snuck his way to his position when he spotted three beings. One was from the video footage, one of the armored beings with stealth technology, one has a similar silhouette as one of the gas bag creature on Eden Prime but it had a light luminescent blue hue about it and it's 'bag' was covered by metal 'armor' with an elongated neck and a small helmet covering the end. Nihlus wasn't able to get a good look at the third figure but he wasn't going to let that stop him from retaking the colony. With his assault rifle ready, Nihlus moved out of cover and took aim. He wasn't expecting this. Nihlus lowered his weapon as he called out the familiar being, "Saren?"

The armored humanoid grabbed a small metal handle from its hip when the other humanoid stopped it. The left arm was from a geth, grafted onto this being with tubes jutting out of the arm and body. The being turned as he replied, "Nihlus."

As Saren moved toward Nihlus, Nihlus was confused, "This isn't your mission, Saren. What are you doing here?" But Nihlus soon raised his weapon again on the armored humanoid, "And you're with thatâ€¦"

Saren stopped him as he placed a hand on his friend's shoulder. "The Council thought you could use some help on this one. I was able to convince this one to fight with us."

Saren then walked out of Nihlus' view as Nihlus relaxed himself with that information and looked toward the spaceport. "I wasn't expecting to find the geth here. The situation's bad."

"Don't worry." Saren grabbed the pistol he had on his hip as he quietly raised it to the back of Nihlus' head, "I've got it under control."

* * *

><p>Saren pulled the trigger, killing Nihlus in a single blow. Rayta watched as the body fell to the floor. "The way of a coward to kill."<p>

Saren read his omni-tool as he replied, "Says the warrior who uses stealth technology on the battlefield." Not giving the Sangheili a chance to defend his honor, Saren told him, "Let us move to the beacon, I'm certain the geth and your men are awaiting us."

Rayta then stopped for a moment as he turned toward the garage. He looked at the crates and thought he saw something hiding among them. He huffed and continued on to the train.

* * *

><p>Moving over the hill the squad of six heard a gunshot ring out from the valley ahead. But what caught their attention was the large ship above the spaceport. Alenko shouted, "What is that? Off in the distance."<p>

Williams was shocked as it started to move skyward and exuded dark

clouds and sparks of red 'lightning', "It's a ship. Look at the size of it!" The ship in question looked like a giant black metal squid.

But the three strangers didn't seem too impressed by the ship. One of the guys in black armor stated, "That's not a Covenant ship."

The man who identified himself as Cortez then reminded the other, "Doesn't matter. We still have a job to do."

The soldier in the strangest armor was already scouting out the enemies ahead of them. With the unique weapon the soldier had found a pair of geth patrolling dangerously close to two IEDs. But there were two spikes with bodies nearby. The soldier raised his left arm as he counted down from three. The instant the soldier hit zero, he grabbed the rifle and fired at the canister. The blast caused the other IED to detonate and engulf both geth in flames but the spikes lowered and the creatures charged them.

The creatures had to work their way up the hill but they had plenty of rocks to give them cover. Cortez switched his SMG for the assault rifle on his back as the creatures moved closer. One of the creatures had climbed onto one of the rock and tried to get the jump on them. Alenko caught it in a biotic Lift as Shepard and Williams riddled it with rounds. The soldier with the elongated helmet had fired at the furthest one, bringing it down before it was a real threat. A third one was running up a rather open path as the trooper in black armor opened fire with the SMG taking it out before it could reach them.

With the area cleared the team moved on. Cortez stopped as he turned to his right, "Look, another shed. Do you think we'll find more survivors?"

Shepard wasn't sure but she was being hopeful, "We won't know until we find out." Just like Dr. Warren's shed, this one was also hard locked. Shepard turned to her lieutenant as she said, "Unlock that door."

As Alenko did, the others took aim at the door just as a precaution. With the door unlocked, Alenko backed up. But the door opened as a man started to shout, "Everybody stay calm out there. We're coming out. We're not armed."

Three people in civilian clothing walked out, two men and a woman. Just from looking at them one could see that they were simple farms, nothing more.

The three of them had their arms raised as the woman asked, "Is it safe? Are they gone?"

Shepard tried to assure the woman as the group eased their weapons. "We took care of them."

The first man then told Shepard, "Those things were crawling all around the shed. They would have found us for sure. We owe you our lives."

The woman seemed in shock, "Iâ€"I still can't believe it. When we saw that ship. I thought it was all over!"

The man seemed calmer now as he added, "It showed up right before the attack. Knew it was trouble the second I saw it. So we made a break for the sheds."

Shepard wanted to know more about the ship she saw, "What else can you tell me about the ship you saw?"

The man rubbed the back of his neck as he tried to recall, "I was too busy running to get a clear look at it. I think it landed over near the spaceport."

The woman added, "Tell them about the noise, Cole. That awful noise."

Cole then told them, "It was emitting some kind of signal as it descended. Sounded like the shriek of the damned. Only it was coming from inside your own head."

Shepard wasn't sure but she thought that might be what caused the loss in communication. "It was probably trying to block communications."

Cole didn't seem to know. "Whatever it was, felt like it was tearing right through my skull. Almost made it impossible to think."

Shepard was still trying to piece together what exactly happened leading to the attack. "Tell me everything you remember about the attack."

Cole started to recall, "The three of us were working the crops when that ship showed up. We just saw it and ran. I don't know what happened to the rest of the crew."

The other man pointed to his right, "They were by the garage. Over near the spaceport. Right where that ship came down. No way they survived."

The woman didn't want to believe that, "You don't know that! We survived. If they made it to the garage, they could've had a fighting chance!"

Cortez asked them, "Were there any other ships? Something bigger or longer."

Cole didn't think so, "I just remember running after seeing that ship come down."

Shepard ended the conversation and started to walk away, "I have to go."

The other man stopped them as he talked to Cole, "Hey, Cole. We've just a bunch of farmers. These guys are soldiers. Maybe we should give them the stuff."

Cole seemed ready to smack the other farmer as he turned around, "Geez, Blake. You gotta learn when to shut up!"

Shepard turned around as she questioned him, "You have something to tell me, Cole."

Cole calmly explained, "Some of the guys at the spaceport were running a small smuggling ring. Nothing major. In exchange for a cut of the profits, we let them store packages in our sheds."

Shepard had grown up with the Alliance most of her life, and she didn't take kindly to lawbreakers, "You're breaking the law, Cole."

Cole knew but he didn't think he was hurting anyone, "We're not hurting anybody! Hell, most of the time, I don't even know what's in the packages. I just thought there might be something we could use. I found a pistol. Figured it would come in handy if those things came back. But you'll probably get more use out of it than we will."

Shepard persuaded him to help. "We're risking our lives to save this colony. You sure there's nothing else in here that could help us out?"

Cole conceded to her, "Yeah, there's one more thing. I was going to sell it after this was over. But you probably deserve it more than I do."

Williams interrupted as she asked, "Who's your contact at the spaceport, Cole? What's his name?"

Cole was hesitant to give a name, "He's not a bad guy. I don't want to get him in trouble. Besides, I'm not a snitch!"

Shepard found a way to convince him, "He might have something to do with whole attack, Cole. We need his name. It's important."

Cole didn't want to get into further trouble, "Yeah, okay. You're right. His name's Powell. Works the docks at the spaceport. If he's still alive."

Shepard turned to her team as she said, "Move out."

The team carefully moved toward the dock as the continued to check for hostiles. Alenko moved up first and found a body. "Commander. It's Nihlus."

As the moved to check the turian, the strange soldier aimed the odd rifle at the crates as Williams also noticed something. "Something's moving! Over behind those crates!"

Alenko grabbed his shotgun, as Cortez and the other trooper in the same combat armor aimed their SMGs at the crate with Shepard and her pistol. Soon a voice shouted, "Wait! Don'tâ€“Don't shoot!" The man slowly raised up, "I'm one of you! I'm human."

Shepard yelled at the man, "Sneaking up on us like that nearly got you killed!"

The man seemed scarred as he answered, "Iâ€“I'm sorry. I was hiding. From those creatures. My name's Powell. I saw what happened to that turian. The other one shot him."

Shepard needed to hear this, "I need to know how Nihlus

died."

Powell recalled, "The other one got here first. He was talking with something in maroon armor and they had something that looked like a blue gas bag. That's when your friend showed up. He called him Saren. I think they knew each other. Saren said he 'convinced' that one to fight with him and your friend seemed to relax. He let his guard downâ€|and Saren killed him. Shot him right in the back. I'm just lucky that thing didn't look closer behind the crates."

Shepard then asked, "Where'd Saren go after he killed Nihlus?"

Powell pointed to his right, "He jumped on the cargo train and headed over to the other platform. Probably going after the beacon. I knew that beacon was trouble. Everything's gone to hell since we found it. First that damn mother ship showed up. Then the attack. They killed everyone. Everyone! If I hadn't been behind the crates I'd be dead, too!"

Before Shepard could ask Powell anything, Cortez questioned him, "Tell me about the other. The one in maroon armor."

Powell started rubbing his hands, "It was a big thing. Taller than Saren or that guy on the floor. The helmet looked like it had tusks and his legs were like a dogs."

Cortez and the others seemed concerned by that bit of information. Cortez then asked the man, "Did you see any other aliens? Things you've never seen before."

Powell remembered vividly, "There were these things, tan skin with armor and red shields. They screeched a lot and had beaks with teeth. I saw a few of them eating bodies that the geth weren't taking."

* * *

><p>Cortez, Six and O'Brien spoke between one another about this new Intel, "Sounds like a Spec-Op Elite and Jackals. Something's not right. Where are the Grunts and the bodies?"<p>

O'Brien started to look around, "Maybe the Covies are learning to clean up after themselves."

Dot noted, "Lance Corporal, I have no records of Covenant ground forces collecting or moving fallen soldiers during any known ongoing operation."

Six wasn't so sure. "I found some blood hidden underneath a patch of tall grass back where we fought those cyberized humans the first time. It was from a Grunt."

O'Brien then asked, "Then what about the Elite that didn't kill Powell. That's just unusual."

Cortez agreed, "If we're lucky we just might be able to ask it after putting a few rounds into him first."

Returning to the conversation between the Commander and Powell, she had asked him about how he survived and was sickened by the fact that

his laziness kept him alive and he had handed over grenades and some experimental tech.

Shepard said, "We need to find that beacon before it's too late."

Powell gave them directions, "Take the cargo train. That's where the other turian went." Powell leaned against the crate as he said, "Iâ€¦I can't stay here." He turned around and walked off, "I need to get away from all this."

Six had already moved toward that area before Powell snuck off to escape the fighting. Soon enough, Six's motion tracker detected moving coming toward her. She knelt down as she used one of the dock's support arms as cover. Six pulled out her knife as one of the hostiles moved closer. Once within her reach, Six threw out her arm as the knife jabbed into something, making a gushing sound with it. The Spartan pulled whatever she had hit toward her and down to the ground to see it. The knife was lodged in a tube on a geth as it tried to remove Six and the knife from it. Six pulled out her pistol as she placed it below the eye and fired two rounds to insure the machine no longer functioned. Her motion tracker detected two more targets; she signaled the group before grabbing the MA37 on her back and moved out to gun down the two geth. She put two sets of controlled bursts into each geth, about eight rounds per burst, spending the entire clip to eliminate both machines. Even with the precise assault, the geth managed to fire off a few rounds against the Spartan, though her shields had taken a few upgrades since their arrival to take the rounds.

Six retrieved her M392 from where she left it as the others moved up. Cortez took lead and as he moved toward the walkway to the train he was shot at. Cortez took cover as the geth continually shot at his position. Six pulled out her knife and tossed it to Cortez. The blade struck the guard railing as he pulled it out and used it to find the geth below. Cortez also spotted two IEDs the machines happened to be standing dangerously close to. He signaled O'Brien to pop the canisters. The ODST grabbed his pistol as he leaned over the railing behind the building and took aim at the closest canister. Two shots were fired, the first one released the gases and the second ignited them.

The canisters erupted into a green mist as the blast knocked both geth down. As the mist covered the machines it slowly started to eat away at them until both geth were reduced to a pool of ash and goo.

The group moved down to the train when the geth onboard opened fire. Most of the geth were hiding behind barriers. Shepard's group took cover behind some of the barriers as the started to retaliate. One of the geth however was far too big to hide behind the barriers but it didn't seem to matter to it as it started to move closer to them. O'Brien pulled out the sniper rifle as the others focused their attention on the regular sized geth. Six detonated another IED that sparked blue and electrocuted two of the geth. With the sniper rifle ready, O'Brien took the shot as the bullet traveled through the heart of the machine and a second geth before imbedding itself into the wall. Alenko used a biotic attack as the geth was thrown off the train and fell to its 'death'. In controlled bursts, Williams and Shepard were able to gun down one of the geth as Six finished the

last one with two rounds from her DMR.

With the area clear, they moved to the front car as Shepard activated it. Now they had to find the beacon, and this Saren.

* * *

><p>Rushing over to the site, Saren and Rayta found one of the geth as it awaited Saren's orders. "Set the charges. Destroy the entire colony. Leave no evidence that we were here." As the white machine moved to achieve this goal, Saren walked up to the beacon as the device gave off a strange green aura. Saren was a foot away from the beacon when he was suddenly lifted into the air. Information started to pour into the turians mind as Rayta walked over the Kig-yar raider waiting to leave the planet. As the process finished, Saren was dropped to the ground. When he recovered, Saren walked toward Rayta and entered the alien ship.<p>

9. Chapter 9

As the geth finished priming the last of the charges one of the geth heard the train as it approached the station. It spotted the six passengers on the car and alerted the others to prepare to defend the bombs.

* * *

><p>As the train slowed down Alenko was the first to spot them, "Demolition charges! The geth must have planted them."<p>

"Hurryâ€"we need to find them all and shut them down!" Williams shouted.

Shepard started to disarm the first bomb as Six and the ODSTs moved on to find the next one. Six already ran across the bridge as she caught sight of the bomb behind a pillar, just out of the line of fire. While Dot gave instructions to Six on how to disarm the explosive as O'Brien and Cortez kept the geth at bay. Shepard finished defusing the bomb and they joined O'Brien and Cortez. By then the ODSTs were about to take out two of the white geth.

The team pinned the geth to allow Shepard to move up to the next det charge. Six knocked down one of the geth's shields but before her kill shot could make contact the machine erected a barrier in the form of a blue hexagon before it. The geth was saved by mere milliseconds as the barrier started to turn to a salmon red. Even with this barrier the geth were still able to shot through it without weakening it. Williams finished off the barrier as O'Brien placed the kill shot. A pair of dark brown geth joined the fight. Interestingly Six's motion tracker became jammed as the two new geth moved closer.

A red light beamed from one of the new geth's rifle as it targeted Cortez's head. Cortez barely avoided the shot as he dove for cover and the shot hit the crate he hid behind. Alenko brought down its shield as Six placed the kill shot through the geth's eye. Shepard finished the disarmament of the third bomb and joined the fight against the last few geth. The second sniper took aim at Six as she

stood her ground. Williams took down the shield as O'Brien placed a few rounds into the machine. With only one white geth left the team concentrated their attack against the machine. The geth was pinned, not able to get a shot off edge wise before it lost its shield. As the others continued to shot at the geth and its cover Six unsheathed her combat knife while running toward the lone geth. Six leaned against the crate the geth was using for cover as she signaled to the others to hold their fire. The sudden quiet made the geth investigate only for a blade to be waiting for the eye. Six knocked the rifle out of its hands and kicked the geth onto the floor where she pinned it under her boot until her pistol was against its chest. Not allowing the geth to register what had happened, Six pulled the trigger three times as the geth finally stopped struggling.

Soon after the last geth was terminated Dot notified Six, "Noble Six, I am detecting one last energy signature matching the explosive devices we disarmed. It is roughly four meters due Southeast of our current position." Six looked toward the wall at the end of the walkway. She quickly ran over behind the support beam where she found the bomb. Following the same procedure as the other charge, Six was able to disarm it with a minute to spare.

Moving on, the team spotted two more geth and a pair of those spike with victims on them. Six already planned a scenario out in her mind, and after Dot reviewed and approved of her strategy, Six jumped over the railing without give the team a warning. The geth and the things seemed to have heard her as they converged on the place she landed. The geth seemed content with letting the husks attack Six as they remained hidden behind the large crates. O'Brien grabbed the sniper rifle as he steadied it. "Say good night robotâ€|" With one in view he took the shot, taking half of the head off with it. Now the geth seemed to be running on basic instincts as it returned fire on the team.

The cyber-humans ignored the others as they ran to the lone target that was Six. She started to shoot at the closest one, breaking through its shield and placing three rounds into its head before it fell to the ground. Unfortunately the other one was too close for her to do that as it started to illuminate blue and sparks started to discharge from its body. Six quickly dropped her weapons as she grabbed for the kukri. As the thing released the energy and Six's systems were knocked out the Spartan continued to charge at the creature. Six memorized where it was before she lost her camera as she started to cut into the thing, striking every vital area with the blade she could. She stopped slashing only when she heard it thud onto the floor before her. Now all she could do was wait until the others finished the geth.

That wasn't going to be long as Shepard and Cortez provided cover fire for the others to move to positions behind the other crates. Cortez was giving them directions, "OK, about two meters in front of Williams is where the geth is."

Alenko's omni-tool activated as it started to construct a small disc with an orange light in the middle. He tossed it at the crate as it detonated, due to proximity. "Go!" The three of them rushed over to it. The tech attack was a sabotage proximity mine that had disabled the geth's weapons. Practically defenseless, the trio easily dispatch with the geth as Williams knocked it to the ground with the butt of her rifle as Alenko and O'Brien finished it with close ranged rounds

into the chest and head.

After O'Brien placed a few more rounds into it after sparking, Alenko and Williams turned to look at a scorched area of the colony, "My God. It's like someone dropped a bomb."

Alenko could only guess as to what caused it, "That must be where the geth ship landed."

O'Brien turned to see but even at such proximity he had seen this carnage before. "We're just lucky the Covies didn't decide to finish the job."

As O'Brien and Cortez moved to check on Six, Shepard and her team checked on the beacon. With it secured Shepard reported, "Normandy, the beacon is secure. Request immediate evac."

Alenko and Williams were in awe as they looked upon the device. "This is amazing. Actual working Prothean Technology. Unbelievable!"

Williams noted, "It wasn't doing anything like that when they dug it up. Something must have activated it."

Alenko reunited with Shepard as he finished the transmission to his ship, "Roger, Normandy. Standing by."

Six's systems were finally restored as they moved to speak with Shepard and Alenko. Williams inched herself a bit closer to examine the beacon. Suddenly the beacon started to surge with power before unleashed a wave of energy. Williams was caught by an energy field as it started to pull her toward the beacon. Six saw William's struggle as she rushed to the soldier's aid. Just as Williams was lifted into the air Six grabbed her as she too was now caught in the strange energy field. Using her strength the Spartan threw Williams out of harm's reach before it grabbed her and lifted her about two feet off the ground.

O'Brien tried to help the Spartan, "Six!"

Cortez stopped his squadmate as he grabbed him by the shoulders, "No! Don't touch her! It's too dangerous!"

Something strange started to happen to Six. Her mind was being flooded with unusual images but much of it was garbled up and she couldn't understand much of it. Before the beacon could finish a power surge overloaded the systems causing the artifact to explode, sending the Spartan flying back about a meter. O'Brien and Cortez checked on Six as Shepard radioed the Normandy.

* * *

><p>As the Normandy made its approach to the starport O'Brien and Cortez discussed the implications and what their next move should be. "Shouldn't we be calling Cerberus for assistance?"<p>

"We can't risk it. We don't have gear that can easily move her and we don't know how intense her injuries are. We need to get her to a medic and that ship has the closest." Cortez also looked forward to not having to work with Cerberus for a time.

O'Brien watched as the hangar opened, "So what do we tell their commanding officer?"

"The truthâ€¦"

* * *

><p>Captain Anderson walked out of the hangar as Shepard saluted to him, "Captain."<p>

Anderson saw the three strangers as he asked, "Commander, what exactly happened here?"

The two men with Six walked over with their helmets removed. The brown haired man spoke first, "We can help with that, sir. But first we would like to ask for your assistance with our squadmate. She's unconscious but we require heavy lift gear in order to move her with her armor."

"And who are you exactly?"

Both men then saluted to the captain, "Master Sergeant Cortez of the UNSC's 105th Shock Troops Division."

"Lance Corporal O'Brien."

Anderson wasn't sure what to make of these two in black armor. "I've never heard of your unit or this UNSC."

Cortez replied, "I didn't expect you to, sir. We can explain everything during debriefing but our friend needs medical attention."

* * *

><p>Sovereign and the alien craft returned to Saren's base. During mid-transit Saren had requested information as to why Nihlus, a close friend he was forced to kill, was on Eden Prime. An asari matriarch in an elegantly designed black dress with an arching headdress as she walked into the room he had confined himself to quietly sit alone was his mind adjusted to the vision. The matriarch cleared her throat to make her presence known to Saren before giving her report. "We identified the ship that touched down on Eden Prime. The Normandy. A human Alliance vessel. It was under the command of Captain Anderson." That name caught Saren's attention, a name from his past. "They managed to save the colony."<p>

Saren quietly asked her, "And the beacon?"

Calmly, she replied, "One of the humans may have used it."

This news made Saren sit up in his seat the moment these words escaped her lips. The lights in the room started to flash red as Saren started to jerk his head. Finally in his fury Saren got up as he started roaring in anger as he started to knock things about the room. One of the objects was sent toward the asari as she moved her head slightly to avoid it. He walked about the room before he grabbed the matriarch's head, roaring in her face. The matriarch did not seem fazed or scared after such a display or when the turian's talons

wrapped themselves around her skull. The room's lighting finally stopped flashing red as it returned to its calm blue hue and Saren took a moment to collect himself after such a display. He slowly back his face away from her face as he ordered, "This human must be eliminated."

* * *

><p>While Rayta and the other aided Saren in his quest for an ancient relic, Pity made his move against Sork. Pity had claimed Sork made an attempt on his life but was foiled only by his geth protectors. Pity went so far as showing video evidence of Sork 'Tasuvai cutting down geth after geth before the Energy Sword was drained forcing the renegade to retreat. In truth, Sork was training his fellow Honor Guardsmen when the announcement was made and the video was fabricated by the geth from security vids of Sork's training sessions. The few Honor Guards loyal to Sork were able to convince him that to die now would mean nothing. His honor had all but been taken from him by Pity and until he can prove otherwise, it would be best for him live to fight another day instead of dying. They then secretly got him to a Seraph-class starfighter as Sork only took an Energy Sword and a Type-25 Directed Energy Rifle to protect himself. The other members of the Covenant had turned on Sork as they attempted to shoot him down, only for his escape into Slipspace. Pity ordered a lance to give chase and to kill Sork on sight, he also sent a small platoon of geth with the Zealot's forces.<p>

* * *

><p>Landing on an unknown world, Sork ran as he heard the shouting of his hunters. Though he couldn't see them, he continued to run. He knew they would not heed him now even if he told them the truth, all the former Light of Sanghelios could do was try and find a way to prove his innocence without shedding the blood of his brethren.<p>

"There he is!" shouted the Sangheili Zealot. They fired shot after shot to kill Sork, but his shield continued to protect him, for a time. Sork turned as he felt a shadow fall over him. All he did he saw a bright blue light as it blinded his right eye. The intense pain tripped Sork as he fell to the sandy ground below. He started to crawl away. He tried to get up, but after being chased for about three kilometers on foot, he was starting to lose his strength.

"Curses," Sork mumbled under his breath. Then something ran past him, and he heard the plasma bolts fly over him. Then a hand grabbed the back of his neck as it pulled him up.

"So much for the Light of Sanghelios. You dishonor us all with what you have done, heretic. May the gods smite you as you pass the gates of hell."

"And may the gods send you to the abyss," Sork shot back despite his dwindling survival odds.

The gold armored Sangheili grabbed the Energy Sword hilt on his hip and activated the weapon, "Now to bleed out what little honor you have left before I kill you."

* * *

><p>A young woman in a beautifully designed envirosuit had tracked down a small patrol of geth to an uninhabited desert world. The woman was a quarian named Tali'Zorah nar Rayya. One of the geth had isolated itself from the others as she quickly disabled the machine and started to capture what little data from its memory core she could before it was completely deleted. She stopped as she heard a crashing sound coming from nearby. Curiosity got the better of her as she shut down her omni-tool and walked away from the dead geth she extracted the data from. She peeked up from behind the sand dune to see two turians. No that can't be right, krogans are the only ones with humps like those. Then the gold one said something that her translator couldn't pick up. Then suddenly two energy pikes appeared in the back of the creature in white. The gold one dropped the other and walked away. She then heard a groan emitted from the one on the ground. So Tali crawled over to check its wounds. Normally she would have made a break for it, but something drew her to the downed thing.<p>

Once close enough, Tali got a better look at the thing. What she noticed was that it had four mandibles each with their own set of teeth, a horizontal burn that covered its right eye, and lastly that it had a very ornamented armor. The base armor was white but it had several jutting spikes that pulsed from an orange glow to a bright yellow. The pauldrons and helmet in particular were the most elegant; the helmet had an arching feature almost like horns. She then noticed its wounds are from the mysterious energy as the two holes went clean through it. Judging from basic anatomy, the wounds purposefully missed the normal vital areas, but left unattended it could end in death. Tali applied medi-gel to the wounds as the thing groaned again. She quickly looked around to see if the other one was coming back. Not seeing it, Tali took apart pieces of a wreckage nearby and made a crude shed. She then proceeded to place the thing on it. Tali took one look at it before dragging the sled back to her transport.

Less than ten meters from the ship, the alien started to try and get back up. Tali stopped it as she tried to calm the being down, "Easy there. You're hurt. You shouldn't move around too much. I'm sorry, I don't know if your eye can be saved but if we don't get you to a doctor you might die." The creature started to shout in an unknown language as it continued to struggle to get to its feet.

* * *

><p>Sork shouted at the masked female as he tried to stand, "Let me be! I would rather fight and die with my honor still intact!" Forgetting about Pity for a moment because of the Zealot's insult, "I will not let his disrespect of me go unchallenged!"<p>

* * *

><p>Tali tried again to convince it to trust her, "Please, I'm only trying to help you. We're at the transport. I can get you to the Citadel and we canâ€¦" Suddenly a loud roar echoed out as they both turned toward the sound's origin. The creature seemed to know the sound well, as it tried to ready itself for battle. "You're in no condition to fight." Even though the large creature did not seem to understand her, it continued to struggle as it prepared for battle.

Soon others of the turian-like creatures started to arrive along with several other species Tali could not identify. She did spot something she wasn't anticipating of the group; geth and they were cooperating with the different organic species. The geth opened fire at the young quarian, most of the shots missed but a few did land but the being she was helping took the hits as its shields buckled for a few moments. Soon a flurry of blue and green lights started to hit the hull as pink needles tried to hit them. Without giving the injured warrior a chance to attack Tali closed the doors to the shuttle and prepared for takeoff.<p>

The being leant itself against a crate as it started to speak in that strange language again.

* * *

><p>Sork told himself, "No matter what happens, I will regain my honor and punish those responsible for this outrage, Pity and those accursed geth." Sork did not like being in debt to anyone, as he turned to the masked female that aided him, uninvitedly, "Female, I will lend you my services until my debt to you has been paid in full. Then, Pity and the geth will suffer my wrath."<p>

The female was flying the ship toward another of the strange relics in space as the ship started to align with the device before being enveloped by the blue energy and being propelled to their next destination. The trip was short, taking seconds what might have been days on a Covenant ship. They had arrived to a nebula with many ships actively traveling through the clouds of dusts and gases. Then he saw it, a massive construction on a scale comparable to a large Covenant capital. The station had five enormous arms and a single tower that stood at the heart of it.

10. Chapter 10

Returning to Unending Resolve, Rayta and the others were informed of Sork's betrayal to the Covenant and his attempt at ending the life of the Prophet. Later Rayta quietly convened a meeting with only a few of his most trusted friends and allies, away from the curious or spies. Raja joined Rayta in his personal quarter as another Shipmaster, Horona 'Lokkatmee, and Weapons Master Sanj'ik soon joined them.

"This is unacceptable! Sork would never do anything that would impede the Great Journey! His duty is to protect the Prophet with his life!"

"Calm yourself, we will get to the bottom of this, Raja." Rayta then turned to the others, "Do you two believe in these accusations?"

Horona wasn't so confident. "The evidence is heavily against the Light of Sanghelios. I just don't know. Many on my ship express the desire to join Quen and the others in their hunt for him. They feel this betrayal dishonors all of us."

Sanj'ik didn't seem to agree. "My clan has known Sork since before he joined the Honor Guardman. Raja is right, he would never do anything against the Covenant or the Great Journey. Even with the video

evidence against himâ€|"

"What video?"

Sanj'ik was able to queue up the video Pity had showed the task force. Rayta stopped the playback, "I feel like I've seen this before â€|"

Raja knew all too well, "It should, that is one of his training sessions. He used only an Energy Sword in a training scenario even after the blade ran out of energy. He continued the session and used the handle to demonstrate to the new Honor Guardman and some of the younger warriors that a weapon is simply a tool and that they can be used for more than just killing. He fell back to cover to employ a trap. This recording is a fabrication!" He turned to the Fleet Master, "We need to confront the Prophet about these lies andâ€|"

"No." Rayta seemed to be in deep thought as he revealed what he had concluded, "Pity cannot be trusted now. His time with Saren and these geth has changed him. Other than the words of a few, there is nothing that even I could do about this. Without physical proof to disclaim these charges we have to continue to go along with this. For the Journey and for those under our command, they need stability. I know you of all people might want to avenge Sork for this injustice but don't, not until we actually have something that is irrefutable to the eye of the others."

* * *

><p>Tali was questioned for hours by Citadel Security before they would even let her enter the Wards. Her friend managed to evade them and their scans as he had made an interesting cloak from a dusty old brown sheet. The important thing was that it covered most of his body while allowing him to see without being seen. As they traveled through one of the alleyways to cut down time, a group of turians boxed the two in. The leader was wearing a C-Sec uniform as he demand, "You've got something we want. Something that no one else needs to know about."<p>

She had reviewed the data files before arriving to the Citadel and Tali could guess who they were working for. "It's the data about Saren and the geth. You can't have it."

The leader made a slight twitch of his mandibles as he told her, "Too bad. We were ordered to kill your alien friend and take the data. I was thinking we might let you live. Now your curiosity is going to cost you." With that the turians grabbed their weapons, preparing to attack. Her friend didn't seem to take kindly to this. He let out a loud roar before grabbing his weapon. It was a strange blue device that looked rather delicately designed with a number of glowing glyphs etched into the frame. Tali also noticed it didn't look like any weapon used in this galaxy as there was no sight, no barrel and there was a strange blue beam that activated as he grabbed the weapon. Before the turians attacked, Tali's acquaintance already fired a single blue bolt of energy at one of the turians. The bolt struck the turian in the chest, yet despite having his kinetic barriers at full strength the attack broke through and made contact. The turian collapsed to his knees as he was screaming in pain. His clothing was burned away as his scales had third-degree burns. A

second shot was fired and this one hit his head, without the kinetic barrier to slow the shot down the burns were far worse than the first, death was near instantaneous.

The turians were caught by surprise by this unusual weapon, so too was Tali for a moment but she quickly recovered from the shock and threw a tech mine at the group behind them knocking most of them back from the blast. The C-Sec officer tried to gun the stranger down but he made a feint as the rounds ripped through the empty rags. Now fully exposed the alien's four mandibles fully extended as he roared at the attackers before striking his weapon against another turian's skull, killing the turian instantly before his head crashed into the wall. With his lackeys out of the way, the alien knocked the rifle out of the C-Sec agent's hands as he grabbed the turian by the throat and dangled him in the air single-handedly.

During this chaos caused by the unknown alien, Tali managed to gun down one of the assailant with her pistol but not without taking a hit to her abdominal region. The injury wasn't fatal and the section seals were working properly, but a medic needed to take a look just to be safe. Now the young quarian was taking cover behind a small crate before the turians decided to try and close in. Her companion saw this and tossed his captive, with great accuracy, knocking the others down. He quickly rushed over to the downed turians before they had a chance to regain their footing. About halfway to the turians, the alien dropped his weapon as he grabbed for a small metal hilt attached to his hip. He tossed the hilt into the air as it activated, generating a pair of dark blue blades that looked like they were made of pure energy. The shape of the blades looked very similar to that of a mass relay, with the hilt as the core of the weapon and the blades themselves were like the prongs, both ending in a fine point. Between the two prongs bolts of electricity would jump from one side to another and the alien continued to run over the downed turians. In one fell swoop, the alien squeezed the hilt as he swung his arm across, cutting off two turian heads.

* * *

><p>With all but the leader dead, Sork grabbed the turian by the throat and dangled him in the air again. "Speak assassin, for these words will be your last. Who is the one who sent you?"<p>

* * *

><p>Tali got up as she walked over to her new acquaintances. "Easy. Now, was it Saren who sent you after us?"<p>

The alien squeezed slightly to get his attention. "Iâ€|I won'tâ€|" Now he started to squeeze harder until the turian started to slap his arm, "Okâ€|Okâ€|yes we were ordered by Saren to retrieve the evidence. He had another, something that looked like a worm in a throne and a priest cloak with him too. It wanted us to kill anyone with youâ€|Now let me goâ€|"

The alien turned to Tali who looked away. With that he squeezed until he heard the bones crack within his hand and the turian coughed up dark blue blood onto his white armor. The turian fell lifeless in his hand and with that the body was tossed aside like refuse. The stranger retrieved his weapon he tossed aside earlier but his injuries from before started to open up. Tali started to walk away

too but before long she started to stagger a bit. Her new friend helped her as she tried to hide the pain, "Don't worry. I'll be fine. We should head to the medial clinic though."

* * *

><p>In one of the Citadel's Upper Wards medical clinics, a red-haired human woman named Chloe Michel was taking inventory when the doors to her clinic opened. As she turned to spot a quarian woman who appeared to have been shot and a taller being, just a bit over seven feet in height, covered in a ragged old brown cloak with a number of holes riddling the tarnished draping's. Her instincts as a medic kicked in as she moved to help both of them. Unfortunately the taller one seemed to distrust her as he let out a subtle yet auditable snarl that kept her at bay. Michel quickly got over it to aid them both, "Please, I'm only trying to help you two."<p>

For some reason it seemed to understand her as it let the quarian walk with her to one of the tables. Michel started to check her suit to ensure that the section seals had closed and that local contaminants had been secluded. So far so good, all that she needed now was some immunobooster stims to help fight off infection. She tried to ask the quarian, "What happened? How were you injured?"

She tried to divert the question, "My friend needs more medical attention than me. Could you check him?"

Dr. Michel returned to the towering giant and as she got closer he started to snarl again. "Please, I only want to help you, but I need to see the extent of your injuries before I can do anything."

He didn't like it but he finally was willing to let her look. Michel noticed the hand as it lifted part of the cloak away for her. The hand was interesting; being that it had two opposable digits out of four and the skin was leathery black. He grunted at her as she was awakened from her moment of curious observation. The armor on the being was unusual, never seeing such a metal or the illumination on it. He showed her his abdominal region where two equidistant holes similar in size were. She started to scan him with her omni-tool to get a better idea as to the extent of the damage. The holes were already cauterized by whatever caused it and it seemed whoever did it knew that these wounds wouldn't cause instant death. It seemed the wound had already been tended to with medi-gel but he needed more.

The quarian asked Michel, "Is he going to be alright?"

Michel confessed, "I've never seen these kinds of anatomical structures, at least not within one species. He has mostly single organs similar to most species but he has a binary circulatory system. The injuries were severe but I think I can help him. So about how you got your injuriesâ€|"

The quarian quickly replied, "Itâ€|it was an accident. But I need to get in contact with the Shadow Brokerâ€|"

* * *

><p>Images continued to flash into Six's mind, most of the images were burry, or out of focus. There were a few though that she could

see and she recognized many of them, unfortunately they mirrored events that the Covenant had done to a number of planets. There were other images, more vivid than the others, something she needed to be wary of? She could determine it, not in the state she was in.<p>

Her body felt sore as her first reaction was to place her hand against her head, despite her GUNGNIR helmet that would be in her way. Immediately as she lifted her arm something was wrong, she felt lighter or the armor was getting weaker. A voice started to shout out as her arm continued to move, "Doctor! Doctor Chakwas, she's waking up."

Now Six knew something was wrong, her hand past the nose of the helmet and it didn't meet any resistance and then her hand landed against her face. This prompted the Spartan to open her eyes to find she wasn't in her armor, just the bodysuit she wore under it. She immediately sit up to survey her surroundings, a confined space, no windows and a few other beds to her right, she was onboard a ship, more precisely in a medical bay. Now the only question was if this was a Cerberus ship or Alliance. She saw two men to her right, a messy red-head and a brown-haired man walked over toward her alongside an older woman with white hair and a younger woman in casual attire. It took her a moment to realize that the two were the ODSs, O'Brien's red mess and Cortez. After that recognition she started to look around the small room. Cortez tried to ease her, "If you're looking for your armor, it's in the room to your left."

The older woman, assumable the doctor, walked around to Six's left as she greeted her, "Good morning miss. You had us worried for a bit. How are you feeling?"

Six could still feel a ringing in her head as she rubbed her temples, "Fine." She turned to Cortez as she immediately asked him, "How long was I out?"

"A little over fifteen hours now, Six. That beacon did something to you."

The other woman, younger with healthy black hair, stepped up, "It's my fault ma'am." It was that soldier with Shepard, Williams, "I must have triggered some kind of security field when I approached it. You had to push me out of the way."

Six didn't feel anything against her about the incident, "You had no way to know what would happen."

The doctor unfortunately had no new information, "Actually, we don't even know if that's what set it off. Unfortunately, we'll never get the chance to find out."

O'Brien recalled the event, "That beacon lifted you up then it exploded. A system overload, or something. The blast knocked you cold."

Cortez continued on, "Shepard and the Normandy crew were kind enough to help bring you aboard so Doctor Chakwas could take a look."

Six nodded to the two of them as she told both, "Thank you."

As Six got up out of the bed Chakwas noted to her, "Physically,

you're fine. But I detected some unusual brain activity, abnormal beta waves. I also noticed an increase in your rapid eye movement, signs typically associated with intense dreaming."

Six closed her eyes for a moment to try and recall what she saw, "I sawâ€"I'm not sure. Death. Destruction. Like a Covenant glassingâ€"but worse."

"Hmmm. I better add this to my report. It mayâ€" ", She noticed two individuals walk in, "Oh, Captain Anderson. Commander Shepard."

Six's old training kicked in, forcing the Lieutenant to stand at attention as the older man in the officer's uniform walked in asking Chakwas, "How's our guest holding up, Doctor?"

"All the readings look normal. I'd say she's going to be fine."

He nodded, "Glad to hear it. Miss, we need to speak with youâ€"in private."

Williams saluted, "Aye, aye, Captain. I'll be in the mess if you need me." Williams and Chakwas walked out but O'Brien and Cortez remained.

"Sounds like that beacon hit you pretty hard, miss. You sure you're okay?"

Six wanted get to the point, "You said you needed to see me in private, Captain?"

Anderson turned to the ODSs, "Your friends were kind enough to give us a briefing. I just want to ensure they aren't making anything up."

Given the gravity of the situation, Six had to be careful as to what she could reveal. It was probably why he wanted to ask now. She had to think of how she would explain the events on Eden Prime. "Sir, we received a partial transmission from Eden Prime about an attack. We moved as quickly as we could to provide aid."

Shepard seemed wary of her, "You don't have to talk in circles. You can talk about this Covenant of yours."

Six turned toward Cortez, unsure if she should be upset for talking about them or glad that for a time they might not have to work with Cerberus. She turned back to the captain as she tried to assess the new situation, "What have they told you, sir?"

Anderson gave her a short answer, "Enough. I just want to see if they're telling the truth or just making it all up."

With that answer she began to explain. "Sir. We received an encoded signal informing us that a possible Covenant attack was occurring on the planet Eden Prime. We knew Eden Prime was a relatively small human colony, but if the Covenant was actually there then we had to take drastic steps in order to save the planet. Covenant forces are relentless when it comes to the extermination of a world and the humans on it. We used a Kodiak to land on the planet. We did not encounter any Covenant forces, just the geth. We lost a few people

before encountering Shepard and her team. We coordinated our efforts to save the colony. From the description of an unknown alien by the dockworker, Powell, it seemed that an unknown called Saren not only had geth working for him but at least a small portion of the Covenant. We removed the geth but did not encounter any Covenant. At the beacon it activated and started to pull Williams in toward it. No one else saw it so I moved to assist. Unforeseen I was taken in her place. After that I awoke here."

Shepard wanted more information, "Tell us more about the Covenant."

Six told them all she knew, "The Covenant is a collection of alien races bound together by their religious belief. They have declared open war and the total annihilation of the human race. The alien described by Powell was of a Sangheili, or what we usually refer to as an Elite, the military leaders of the Covenant. Description of the armor configuration was that of a SpecOp. They're used for assassinations, sabotage, and retrieving artifacts central to their religion. Whatever they were after on Eden Prime it seemed they were able to acquire it."

Shepard turned to Anderson as he whispered, "Almost word for word as to what Cortez told us."

Anderson started speaking to the group, "Then if everything you've told us is the truth, then we have more urgent concerns to deal with. It's Saren, that other turian." It seemed the others were already informed but Anderson was specifically telling Six, "Saren's a Spectre, one of the best. A living legend. But if he's working with the geth and this Covenant, it means he's gone rogue. A rouge Spectre's trouble. Saren's dangerous. And he hates humans."

Six surmised, "He didn't come to Eden Prime because he hates humans, sir."

Anderson replied, "You're right. Saren has allied himself with the geth and this Covenant. I don't know how. I don't know why. But it had something to do with that beacon." He turned to Six again, "You were there just before the beacon self-destructed. Did you see anything? Any clue that might tell us what Saren was after?"

Six tried to recall it, "There was something. It was forcing a vision into my mind."

Shepard asked Six, "A vision? A vision of what?"

Six saw enough of the vision as she tried to review the images in her mind. "There were machines. Maybe the geth. Slaughtering people. Butchering them like Brutes."

Anderson didn't like the sound of that, "We need to report this to the Council."

Shepard turned to her commanding officer as she questioned that choice of action, "What are we going to tell them? She had a bad dream?"

O'Brien started to drift as he looked at Six. She reminded him of Cal in many respects, though physically they were polar opposites; from

Six's short black hair and Cal's long white hair to Cal's golden eyes and Six's hazel eyes the thing that made the two Spartans similar was their commitment to duty and willingness to sacrifice themselves for others.

As the conversation seemed to be consisted of Shepard, Anderson and Cortez, Six excused herself into the room that Cortez indicated her armor was in. Everything was there except for the weapons. _There probably in the ship's armory._ Six started to refit her armor back on. The last piece was her GUNGNIR helmet. She paused for a moment as she gazed into the small golden eye and her own reflection. She looked upon the warrior that she had become because of the Covenant. She flashed back to when her life was changed forever; her family along with a small squad of marines slain before her eyes by a lone Elite minor, then something inside her snapped and she killed the Elite with her father's knife, the same combat knife she still carried with her to this day. Another Elite had observed her kill its comrade, yet it did not attempt to take revenge for it. Instead it told her something, something in its native tongue before disappearing just as UNSC reinforcements arrived. With that memory over, Six placed a firm grip on her helmet and put it back on, ready to fight again.

11. Chapter 11

****A/N: ****Now for the first real update for this story. I've noticed a lot of you guys really like my story(or at least are favoriting it), but I'm not sure if it really is worth it. Well now its time for Six and the others to take their first step onto the Citadel...

* * *

><p>The team disembarked from the Normandy. The only good thus far that Six has seen for working with Cerberus were the forged identities as they passed through C-Sec Academy without much fuse. Six did notice a few eye watching them was the continued to the human ambassador's office.<p>

* * *

><p>Inside the ambassador's office, Udina was arguing with the three Councilors shouting, "This is an outrage! The Council would step in if the geth attacked a turian colony!"<p>

The salarian member quickly replied with a retort, "The turians don't found colonies on the borders of the Terminus Systems, Ambassador."

The asari Councilor reminded Udina, "Humanity was well aware of the risks when you went into the Traverse."

Udina quickly asked, "What about Saren? You can't just ignore a rogue Spectre. I demand action!"

The turian answered with spite, "You don't get to make demands of the Council, Ambassador."

The asari tried to be the mediator between the members and Udina, calmly reminding Udina, "Citadel Security is investigating your

charges against Saren. We will discuss the C-Sec findings at the hearing. Not before." With that the three holograms shut down.

Udina walked over to the group as he called out the captain, "Captain Anderson. I see you brought half your crew with you." Six had not encountered a true politician until now, and she really did not like the impression Udina and the Councilors were giving her.

Anderson corrected the ambassador, "Just the ground team from Eden Prime. In case you had any questions."

Udina angrily scowled, "I have the mission reports. I assume they're accurate?"

Anderson calmly replied the agitated ambassador, "They are. Sounds like you convinced the Council to give us an audience."

Udina was a please as the Councilors, "They were not happy about it. Saren's their top agent. They don't like him being accused of treason."

Shepard retorted Udina, "Saren's a threat to every human colony out there. He needs to be stopped. The Council has to listen to us."

Udina wasn't so willing to back down, "Settle down, Commander. You've already done more than enough to jeopardize your candidacy for the Spectres. The mission on Eden Prime was a chance to prove you could get the job done. Instead, Nihlus ended up dead and the beacon was destroyed!"

Anderson defended his XO, "That's Saren's fault, not hers!"

Udina wasn't as willing to accept such a judgment, "Then we better hope the C-Sec investigation turns up evidence to support our accusations. Otherwise the Council might use this as an excuse to keep you out of the Spectres. Come with me, Captain I want to go over a few things before the hearing. Shepard- you and the others can meet us at the Citadel Tower. Top level. I'll make sure you have clearance to get in."

As Anderson and Udina left, Williams could only shake her head as he commented to the team, "And that's why I hate politicians."

Shepard turned to Six and her friends as she ordered them, "You three just stay here until the meeting is over with. We'll discuss what happens after that."

Six nodded in compliance as Shepard and her team left to join Udina and Anderson. After Shepard was gone, O'Brien asked Six, "So what's the plan now, Six?" Six didn't respond as she returned to the ledge as she watched the diplomats and politicians continue about their day. Cortez grabbed O'Brien giving him a stern look to let her be.

In truth Six was still sifting through the information endowed to her by the beacon before it exploded, fortunately with Dot's assistance they were able to make more sense of the data. Dot has been able to determine that whatever the race this information was meant for and crated by has been exterminated by a powerful and efficient machine

race. The majority of the message has become corrupted, lost to time itself. But the facts were clear, the machines that wiped this race out still existed somewhere the only question that remained in Six's mind was why the machines didn't stay after eliminating the previous dominate race. This question also perplexed Dot and concluded that unless they can find more data that question would remain an enigma.

Cortez was still looking over the ledge, as he couldn't help but comment, "So this is what peace must feel like, when you don't have to constantly watch your back for an attack, to not constantly worry about war finding you. It's a rather nice feeling."

Six simply continued to stare out, not saying a word. Even with the two months of working together, Six continued to maintain an emotional barrier between herself and others, partly for the feelings she went through with the deaths of Noble Team. Six normally worked alone even when she was assigned a squad so she never had to worry about getting too attached to anyone, but after finally being assigned to a real solidified team, she couldn't help but bond with the other Nobles. But Cortez has been trying to get her to open up again and while the two did so, O'Brien couldn't help but wondered off for a bit within the embassies.

* * *

><p>O'Brien walked through the door and found a volus and two elcor. O'Brien had seen images of the two species but he didn't think the elcors had such muscular arms. The two elcors were in the middle of a conversation, "This is serious. My reputation is at stake. I spoke with the Consort in confidence, and her alone. And she betrayed that confidence."<p>

"All right. I will look into it for you. In the meantime, do not do anything rash."

One of the elcor noticed O'Brien approach, "Hello there, human. Sincere apology, but I am here on business and cannot be distracted right now."

O'Brien rubbed the back of his head, unsure of how to approach this, "Uhâ€|You seem distressed."

The elcor didn't seem to have changed much but it's feelings were otherwise, "Alarmed response, you overheard that, did you? This is all going so wrong, and it is the asari Consort's fault. She's the one who started all this."

O'Brien was partly lost, "Who's this asari Consort?"

The elcor was genuinely surprised, "Curious, you have not heard? You must be new to the Citadel. Everyone knows Sha'ira, the Consort. I cannot speak more about this problem; it is too sensitive. Suffice it to say, she has compromised my authority as a diplomat."

O'Brien didn't see this as an issue he should deal with, "Well, good luck with that."

The elcor bowed his head slightly as he expressed himself, "Thanks to you, human. Good day."

O'Brien walked out of the embassy only to run into Six and Cortez.
"Hey guysâ€¦I was justâ€¦looking for myâ€¦"

"O'Brien what are you doing?"

"What, I was just looking around ok? Besides we're still in the same area. It's not like we take orders from them."

Cortez corrected him, "The UNSC doesn't exist here, remember? Our rank means nothing here."

Six grabbed Cortez's shoulder as she told him, "I think we should tell him."

O'Brien wasn't sure if he was going to like this, "Tell me what?"

Six switched to their helmeted channels as she answered, "About Cerberusâ€¦"

* * *

><p>Dr. Michel had pointed Tali to a Broker contact in the Wards, the owner of Chora's Den, Fist. A krogan bouncer inside the club escorted the duo into Fist's office in the back of Chora's Den. Fist graciously treated the two to a seat, "Welcome. You must be the quarian Dr. Michel told me about. Who's your friend?"<p>

Tali turned Fist's attention back to the matter at hand, "Forget about him. Remember why we're here."

Fist continued to act calm and professional around the two, "Yes, of course. Now if you just hand that data over to me, I'll gladly haveâ€¦"

"No," Tali interrupted, "The Shadow Broker promised to meet in person for the deal. I won't hand over the data unless he's there. The Broker said you could set the meeting up."

Fist clenched one of his fists but it quietly subsided, "Right. But it's going to take some time for the Broker to find time in his schedule to meet. Tell you what," Fist sent her the coordinates for the meeting, "here's where the meetings going to be, in about an hour or so. I'll even be there for the trade."

Tali looked over the location and she didn't like its isolation, but she had little choice. "Fine. We'll be there. Thank you, Fist."

Tali and her acquaintance left Chora's Den, and Fist made contact with Saren. "Saren, this is Fist. That quarian came in. She wanted to deal with the Broker in person. I've set up a location for your men to take the data."

The hologram appeared on his desk, "What about the one who led her to you?"

Fist nodded to a few of his thugs, "Don't, I'll make sure she won't tell anyone."

* * *

><p>"What!" O'Brien was disgusted with the new information, "So we've been working with the terrorists? Why didn't either of you tell us?"<p>

Cortez calmly pointed out, "Because of that reaction you, and Duvall might have had. I know for a fact you might have gone and blown a gasket just like this. If we play our cards right, we might not have to worry about that and work with the Alliance instead."

Just as Six was able to comment, she received a message from Shepard, "Six, we're heading to Chora's Den in the Wards. Meet us there."

Six replied with a short response, "Yes, ma'am. We'll meet you there ASAP." The call ended and Six turned to the ODSs, "Shepard has requested we meet her at Chora's Den."

O'Brien stopped them before they left the embassy area, "Hold up guys. One of those elcor guys said he was having a problem with some asari Consort named Sha'ira. If we are going to be helping the Alliance, shouldn't we also be helping a diplomat from another race?"

Cortez and Six looked to one another, unsure if they should even consider undertaking the endeavor.

* * *

><p>Leaving O'Brien to lead them, they entered the Consort's Chambers where they were greeted by another asari, "Welcome. I am Nelyna. I don't recognize any of you as one of our expected clients today. Would you like me to see when the Consort will be able to meet with you?"<p>

Cortez questioned Nelyna, "Can't we just go in?"

Nelyna continued to keep her rather happy grin as she answered, "Mm, I'm afraid not. Yeah, you must understand, there are many who seek the Consort's services. But if you wish to leave your name, she'll make every effort to meet with you."

Before O'Brien could do so, Six also had a question for Nelyna, "What does the Consort do?"

Nelyna was a bit conflicted about the answered, "It is difficult to explain. She is many things to many people, and something different for each. Some seek her for advice, some for entertainment, others still for pleasure. Most of the time, our clients won't realize what they were seeking until after she has provided it for them."

Cortez was slightly impressed, "You make her sound like some kind of oracle."

Nelyna tried to correct the misunderstanding, "No, not in the usual sense. She is merely a woman. A woman with remarkable compassion and a generous spirit. I suggest you make an appointment and see for yourself."

O'Brien decided he would indulge, "Alright. Put me down."

O'Brien."

Nelyna checked her records as she entered him in, "Excellent. You should hear something inâ€|hmm, three or four months."

O'Brien quickly lost his amazement over her, "What? Nobody's worth that much of a wait."

"Well, that's not for me to judge. I have your name and you'll be contacted. Is there anything else?"

Six nudged O'Brien's shoulder, "I think I'm done here."

Nelyna was almost sad to see them go so soon, "Aw. Well, I hope that you will return again in the future, we always enjoy seeing new clients." Before they could leave, Nelyna received a call in her earpiece. "Yes, Sha'ira? Yes. Of course, mistress." Nelyna shrugged, "Huh. It appears the Consort has taken notice of you. She'd like to meet with all three of you now."

Six and Cortez turned to each other, suspicious of the sudden change, "Why's she willing to see us now? I thought she had a list of clients?"

Nelyna shrugged again, "I don't know. You'll have to ask her yourself." She pointed them along the way, "Just head upstairs. She will be waiting for you."

Six noticed a volus client as he nervously was speaking with one of the other asari in the same outfit Nelyna was wearing, the pink dress with circles revealing her skin around her chest and stomach areas. The stairs lead to a small hallway with a door at the end. Entering, the room was rather spacious, a sofa with a table and a few drinks on it, a number of potted plants around the corners and a very unusual purple orb, unsure of its purpose or design.

A lone asari looking out what appeared to be a window, but before they could walk too far into the room the asari stops them, "That is close enough. I hear a great many things on our Citadel, yet you three seem to elude me."

Cortez asked Sha'ira "Is that why you wanted to speak with us?"

"I have a certain problem that could use your expertise," Sha'ira answered as she moved closer to the group.

Cortez wasn't sure about the situation, "Tell us your problem. We might help."

"I have a friend. Septimus, a retired turian general. I won't discuss the details, but he wanted me to be more than I could be. We had a falling out. Now he spends his days in Chora's Den drinking and spreading lies about me." Sha'ira moved closer to the group, passing both O'Brien and Cortez for Six as she started to caress Six's helmet, "If you would speak to him as a fellow soldier, I believe he will listen to you and let the matter be."

Six however felt very uncomfortable about having this woman touching her like this, even with her armor on, but she continued to remain calm and collective around the others. Cortez however found it rather

convenient that this Septimus happened to be in the same place they were meant to meet with Shepard. Cortez answered, "No promises. If we happen to find him, we'll talk. No guarantees he'll listen."

Sha'ira seemed rather content with the terms, "Thank you. That is all I can ask. Appeal to his sense of honor. Remind him of his position as a general." Sha'ira started to rub the side of her head against Six's helmet now as she seemed to be 'sweetening the deal', "If you can convince him to stop spreading lies about me, I would be very grateful." Sha'ira finished and turned around back to the other end of the room telling them, "Now, I must ask you to take your leave. I have many clients waiting to see me." Six couldn't help but feel uneasy about Sha'ira and why she tried to attach herself to her.

* * *

><p>Using the shuttles, Six and the other arrived to the entrance to Chora's Den just as Shepard and her team arrived. The team proceeded to Chora's Den only to be attacked by a group of turians, "That's her." They quickly took cover as the turians opened fire on them. Six wasn't going to let these assassins harm the others.<p>

As Shepard started to fire on the turians, Six moved closer to the assassins while hugging the railing. O'Brien was able to kill one with a head shot from the sniper rifle he had but there were still three more to deal with. Six was now next to the assassins when she pulled out Emile's kukri. Kaidan grabbed one of the turians in a biotic field as he was lifted into the air, helpless as Cortez and Ashley gunned him down. Six swung her left arm around the corner with blade in hand and jabbed one of the turians in the back of the leg. The turian let out an agonized scream as Six pulled the blade out and jabbed it through the jaw and into his brain. Six knocked the assault rifle out of his hand and used the body as a shield as she moved closer to the last assassin. Six waited for the assassin's rifle to overheat, that when she tossed the body aside before grabbing the last assassin by the throat and crushing his windpipes as he tried to claw at her armored arm.

The team moved to investigate the bodies and Alenko was able to find something on the turians, "Those were Saren's men."

Ashley kicked one of the bodies, "And that just means we're on the right track to busting that turian."

Walking into Chora's Den, the bar had a dancing circle above them as human women and asari stripping for people as a few were providing private dances. Six wasn't impressed but she deferred to Shepard as to the teams next move. Chora's Den wasn't that big, Shepard turned to Six, "You three check the right, we'll look to the left. We're looking for a guy named Harkin."

Six nodded as she led Cortez and O'Brien away. Shepard soon found an argument between two krogans. The clubs bouncer pushed to armored battled-hardened veteran, "Back off, Wrex. Fist told us to take you down if you showed up."

Wrex wasn't afraid as he tried to goad the bouncer, "What are you waiting for? I'm standing right here. This is Fist's only chance. If he's smart, he'll take it."

The bouncer wasn't letting Wrex through, "He's not coming out, Wrex. End of story."

Wrex wasn't finished yet, "This story is just beginning." As Wrex left he encountered Shepard, though he was angered he didn't need to fight, "Out of my way, humans. I have no quarrel with you," pushing his way out of the club.

Kaidan turned to the others, "What was that all about?"

Ashley wasn't sure, "Who knows? Let's just try not to get caught in the middle."

* * *

><p>Six continued to survey the humans in the club but O'Brien found something else. "Hey, I think we found that Septimus guy Sha'ira wanted us to talk to." Six and Cortez watched over O'Brien as he walked up to the turian drinking alone as he tried to get his attention, "Septimus?"<p>

The turian had dark scales with a lot of white facial tattoos, "Hmph. What do you want?"

O'Brien tried to be chummy with the disgruntled turian, "You look like you've got a lot on your mind."

Septimus smelled of alcohol as he spoke, "I've seen a lot of horrible things in my days and there's only one woman in this damn galaxy that helps me forget it." Six wasn't as sure about that statement as she watched Reach turn to glass.

Cortez saw a contradiction in his actions, "So if you feel that way, why spread these lies about her?"

Septimus didn't see it as such, "'Cause she rejected me. Me! Septimus Oraka, general of the turian fleet!"

Cortez asked the retired general, "Is she really worth all of this trouble? There has to be another woman out there."

Septimus finally confessed, "It's not just any woman I want. It's her, and her alone." Septimus lost some of his steam as he leaned back into his chair, "Look, kids, I appreciate what you're trying to do, but don't waste your time."

Six finally spoke to Septimus, "General, battles aren't won by drinking them away."

Septimus let out a loud chuckle, "Ha, war! That's what this feels like all right. How did I let it come to this?" realizing just how childish he had been. "So you think it's that easy? Just straighten up and act like a general?"

Cortez could only tell Septimus, "I don't think it could hurt if you did."

"Huh. Maybe you're right. Sha'ira's worth the effortâ€|even if she won't have me back." Septimus finally made up his mind, "All right. I'll go to herâ€|after I've had a cold shower. Or two." He then

thought about something, "Say, you seem like bright kids. Would you be interested in earning a few extra credits?"

O'Brien turned to the others, who didn't seem to mind. "What do you want us to do?"

"There's an elcor diplomat out there who believes Sha'ira gave up his secrets."

O'Brien remembered listening to the conversation as he asked curiously, "Why does he think that?"

"Because I told him. Look, I just need you to convince him of the truth." Septimus pulled out a datapad and handed it to O'Brien, "Take this datapad. It shows where I got my info. It will exonerate Sha'ira and convince the elcor."

Cortez asked Septimus, "Why can't you tell him yourself?"

"Well, the last time he saw me, I was disparaging his ancestors and shouting his secrets in public."

O'Brien nodded, "I think I know where to find him."

Septimus grabbed his glass as he made a toast, "Well. Here's to soldiers acting like soldiers." Septimus finished off the drink as he got out of his seat, "Thanks. You knowâ€¦you might make a good general yourself one day," directing the comment to Six. With the glass empty, Septimus left.

* * *

><p>AN: **I'm not sure if you guys will continue to read my story but I'll try to continue it. My updates will be irregular as I have two other stories I have to continue with(but one of them should be rather close to finishing). See you all on the flipside...

12. Chapter 12

**A/N: **Sorry for such a long wait, sorta focusing on finishing my Commando story first before ME3 comes out. Then I'll have this and another story to deal with then my Commando story picks up after I finish playing through ME3 a few times.

* * *

><p>Shepard approached a man sitting alone at a table as he made a pass at her, "Hey there, sweetheart. You looking for some fun? 'Cause I gotta say that soldier getup looks real good on that bod of yours. Why don't you sit your sweet little ass down beside old Harkin? Have a drink and we'll see where this goes."<p>

Shepard was disgusted by Harkin, "I'd rather drink a cup of acid after chewing on a razor blade."

Harkin simply smiled on as he joked with her, "You trying to hurt my feelings? You gotta do better than that. After twenty years with C-Sec, I've been called every name in the book, princess."

Shepard really didn't like Harkin and wasn't going to take that from the drunker, "Call me princess again and you'll be picking your teeth up off the floor. Now tell me where Garrus is!"

Harkin still wasn't taking her seriously but retracted himself, "Okay, okay. Just relax. Garrus, you say?" He had to think for a moment before he realized who she was, "Heh. You must be one of Anderson's crew. Poor bastard's still trying to bring Saren down, eh?" Harkin then told her, "I know where Garrus is. But you gotta tell me something first. Did the captain let you in on his big secret?"

Six and the others walked up and found Shepard talking to Harkin as she tried to end her conversation with him, "Just tell me where Garrus is before this gets ugly."

Harkin however seemed to disagree, "But it's all related. Don't you see? The captain used to be a Spectre. Didn't know that, did you? It was all very hush-hush. The first human ever given that honor. And then he blew it. Screwed up his mission so bad they kicked him out. Of course, he blames Saren. Says the turian set him up."

Shepard wasn't going to indulge Harkin, "Just tell me where Garrus went."

Harkin willingly told them, "Garrus was sniffing around Dr. Michel's office. She runs the med clinic on the other side of the wards. Last I heard, he was going back there."

"I'm out of here."

Harkin yelled, "Yeah. Good. Go. Let me drink in peace."

Outside Chora's Den Shepard turned to Six, "We know where Garrus is, but I still want to follow up on that lead from the Shadow Broker agent, Barla Von. Six, take your team and find Garrus. He's supposed to be in a med clinic on the other side of the wards." Six nodded and walked off to find Garrus.

* * *

><p>Six found the med clinic Shepard spoke about. She felt something amiss as she signaled O'Brien and Cortez to have their weapons at the ready as she grabbed her DMR. Opening the door they are treated to a scene of a doctor being threatened by a group of thugs and a turian C-Sec agent quietly sneaking up behind them. The doctor screamed, "I didn't tell anyone. I swear!"<p>

The lead man with an eye piece advised her, "That was smart, Doc. Now, if Garrus comes around, you stay smart. Keep your mouth shut or we'll," He noticed the door closing as well as Six and the others as he grabbed the doctor as a human shield and aimed his pistol on them demanding, "Who are you?"

Six already had her DMR aimed at the thug's head along with O'Brien with the Automag. Cortez warned him, as he too had his suppressed SMG out, "You really want to pick a fight with two of the best snipers out there?"

The turian saw an opening and took the shot. Killing the man with a

single shot. The doctor screamed in horror as the man fell to the floor. The other men stepped back in fear as the turian took a step forward allowing the doctor to run back to him. Six fired a warning shot to get their attention as the turian grabbed the doctor to safety. O'Brien took down the first guy, two rounds into his head as Cortez riddled the second thug with the SMG. Dot detected two more hiding, one behind a pillar and another stuck behind a crate.

Six pulled out a grenade and rolled it to the back of the room. The one thug behind the box had nowhere to go and was killed by the shrapnel. Now Six was waited patiently for the last thug to try and attack them. He knew he was cornered and outnumbered, but she knew this guy wasn't going to give up so easily. The man pulled out to try and attack and Six preformed a double-tap into the man's head. After the man fell, Six and Cortez checked the bodies as O'Brien covered them. With the area secured Six spoke with Garrus.

Garrus congratulated them, "Perfect timing. Gave me a clear shot at that bastard."

Cortez had a mind to yell at Garrus, but O'Brien commended him for his marksmanship skills, "You took him down clean."

Garrus humbly replied, "Sometimes you get lucky." With the air clear, Garrus turned to the doctor, "Dr. Michel? Are you hurt?"

The doctor was shaken but no damage was done, "No. I'm okay. Thanks to you. All of you."

Six tried to aid the doctor, "We can protect you, ma'am. Just tell us who they work for."

Michel seemed hesitant as she rubbed her hands, "They work for Fist. They wanted to shut me up, keep me from telling Garrus about the quarian."

Cortez asked, "What quarian?"

Michel recalled the unusual events, "A few days ago, a quarian and her associate came by my office. She'd been shot, and her friend had received a pair of burns equidistant and equal in depth." The sound of the injury sounded too familiar for Six and the ODSTs. "The large associate was rather reluctant to let me help but both wouldn't tell me who did it. I could tell she was scared, probably on the run. She asked me about the Shadow Broker. She wanted to trade information in exchange for a safe place to hide."

Cortez asked Dr. Michel, "Then what?"

"I put her in contact with Fist. He's an agent for the Shadow Broker."

Garrus had information that seemed to contradict hers, "Not any more. Now he works for Saren, and the Shadow Broker isn't too happy about it."

Michel was surprised, "Fist betrayed the Shadow Broker? That's stupid, even for him. Saren must have made him quite the offer."

Garrus didn't like any of this, "That quarian must have something Saren wants. Something worth crossing the Shadow Broker to get."

Six could only think of one thing the quarian might have, "Did the quarian mention anything about the geth?"

Michel remembered, "She did! The information she was going to trade. She said it had something to do with the geth."

Garrus agreed with Six's assessment, "She must be able to link Saren to the geth. There's no way the Council can ignore this!"

Six nodded to Cortez before he declared, "Time we rendezvoused at Chora's Den."

Garrus stopped them before they left the clinic, "Hold up. I don't know how you're connected to all of this, but I want to bring Saren down. I'm coming with you!"

O'Brien questioned the validity of his conviction, "You're a turian. Why do you want to bring him down?"

Garrus openly admitted his failure, "I couldn't find the proof I needed in my investigation. But I knew what was really going on. Saren's a traitor to the Council, and a disgrace to my people!"

Six answered him as she opened the door, "You can come along. But Shepard will be the one to say if you stay."

Garrus thought of another, "You know, we aren't the only ones going after Fist. The Shadow Broker hired a krogan bounty hunter named Wrex to take him out."

Six remembered what Shepard said when they split up, "I think Shepard's already talking to him."

* * *

><p>Barla Von had pointed Shepard to a krogan bounty hunter hired by the Shadow Broker to kill Fist. Currently he was taken to the C-Sec Academy to have a 'talk' with some of the officers. Inside the Academy, Shepard found Wrex speaking with a human C-Sec agent while being surrounded by two other officers with assault rifles in hand. Shepard noticed a number of claw marks running down Wrex's crest and ending on his neck. The human officer told Wrex, "Witnesses saw you making threats in Fist's bar. Stay away from him."<p>

Wrex wasn't afraid as he poked the human C-Sec agent in his chest, "I don't take orders from you."

"This is your only warning, Wrex," the human leaned forward into his face trying to intimidate the large krogan.

Wrex responded as he moved his head closer, "You should warn Fist. I will kill him."

The agent had to step back to balance himself as Wrex was able to lean further than him. "You want me to arrest you?"

Wrex could only laugh at the notion as he answered, "I want you to

try." Wrex then noticed Shepard observing the conversation.

The krogan glared at the human before walking away. The officer yelled as the krogan had his back to them, "Go on. Get out of here," before leaving themselves.

Wrex could tell they wanted to speak with him about something, "Yes, human."

Shepard skipped the formalities and got to the point, "I'm trying to bring down Saren. Barla Von said to talk to you."

Wrex agreed, "Barla Von is a wise man. We may share a common goal, human."

Shepard crossed her arms as she told him, "Enlighten me."

Wrex gladly did so, "I've been hired to kill the owner of Chora's Den. A man named Fist. He did something very foolish."

Shepard remembered Barla Von's words, "He betrayed the Shadow Broker."

Wrex continued, "A quarian showed up here on the Citadel. She was on the run. She wanted to trade information for a safe place to hide, so she went to Fist. He promised to arrange a meeting between her and the Shadow Broker. Instead, he contacted Saren."

Shepard didn't think much of Fist, "Fist's not too smart."

Wrex corrected the view, "He's just greedy. Saren paid him a small fortune for the quarian. He had to. She has evidence connecting him to the geth."

Kaidan couldn't help himself as he noted, "If we get our hands on that evidence, we can prove that Saren's a traitor! The Council will have to listen to us."

Shepard asked Wrex, "Where's the quarian now?"

Wrex wasn't entirely sure, "Last I heard, Fist still had her. Probably somewhere inside his club. You help me kill Fist, she's all yours."

Shepard nodded as she extended a hand for Wrex to shake, "Time we paid Fist a visit."

* * *

><p>Six, Garrus and O'Brien moved to rendezvous at Chora's Den while Cortez returned to Ambassador Udina's office. A shuttle had arrived with Shepard, Ashley and a scarred krogan in red armor. Shepard turned to Six, "So I'm assuming you have the same intel as us?"<p>

Six swiftly responded, "A quarian with data pertaining to the geth and Saren, held by Fist."

Shepard nodded as she moved toward Chora's Den. The neon lights were off and the door to the club was closed. Garrus had never seen the

neon lights off before, "Looks like its shut down."

Wrex grabbed his shotgun, "Fist knows we're coming."

Six turned to O'Brien and he responded with a nod. O'Brien switched his SMG for the sniper rifle slinged around him. He positioned himself at the far end of the walkway as he set up behind the barrier. Six positioned herself near the ODST sharpshooter as her DMR was ready to fire.

Shepard checked to see that everyone was ready before activating the door. Immediately, O'Brien found a target. A bartender was waiting with a pistol behind the bar, instead of a trooper at the door, there was a sniper barrel staring at him from across the walkway. O'Brien took the shot and the man fell quickly. After O'Brien's clean kill, Six moved up keeping to the wall to the right as she carefully checked for any hostiles. She spotted one using an overturned table for cover, though he was exposing much of himself due to the circular shape as a second guard was trying to turn one of the high tables over.

As Six took care of those thugs, Shepard spotted another who was underneath a table that had not yet been overturned, leaving the thug completely exposed. After both were killed, Six fell back as Garrus moved up and checked for more resistance. The turian was able to gun down a guard hiding in one of the private booths before he quickly returned to cover as the krogan bouncer began blasting the area with a shotgun. Wrex took this opportunity to kill the bouncer himself as he waited for his shotgun to overheat. Wrex waited until he heard the other krogan cursing his weapon and when the firing stopped. Wrex sent the bouncer flying with a blast of biotics as Shepard and Garrus moved into the club.

Six spotted another thug hiding on the dance platform above as he tried to hide himself behind the rather large pole. Six coordinated with Shepard and Garrus to flush out the hired gun. She lobbed a grenade onto the platform. The man dove off the stage and to the floor where Garrus and Shepard were waiting. The thug quickly grabbed for his gun as he tried to gun them down, only for Garrus and Shepard to finish him before he could break through either's shields.

Now Wrex and the bouncer were fighting at one of the private dance tables as Wrex started to pound the bouncer's head against the wall before finally taking his shotgun and blasting several holes through the bouncer's jaw and head. O'Brien moved up to the bar when Dot stopped him, "O'Brien. Six's motion tractors detect four more hostiles awaiting us." Six grabbed a flashbang as she crept to the walkway the bouncer once guarded. She pulled the pin as she rolled the canister into the hallway. The two guards watch as it rolled into the door and bounced off stopping a few centimeters away. In an instant they were blinded and deafened, giving Six the chance to strike. As the two were still recovering, Six grabbed her combat knife and threw it at the first guard. The blade hit its intended target, into the man's skull as she pulled out the kukri and quickly shortened the distance between her and the remaining thug. Before he knew it Six had killed him with a slash to the neck, nearly severing the head from the body.

With the Chora's Den clear, the team gathered at the door to the back room as Six cleaned her blades on the bodies of the guards before

sheathing them. Shepard opened the door to find two unlikely protectors with pistols in hands, "Stop right there! Don't come any closer!"

Garrus was surprised by them, "Warehouse workers. All the real guards must be dead."

The other worker yelled, "Stay back or we'll shoot!"

Shepard didn't want to kill the two if she didn't have to. She tried to convince them Fist wasn't worth their lives, "This would be a good time to find somewhere else to work."

"Yeah. Yeah, right. That's a good idea."

"Yeah. I never liked Fist anyway." With that both workers walked out of the club.

Wrex didn't see the point in sparing them however, "It would've been quicker to just kill them."

Ashley told the krogan, "Shooting people isn't always the answer." Six also agreed with her as she moved on.

Now they opened the door to the back room and they found two room dividers placed unusual next to their door and the door opposite to them. O'Brien and Garrus ran to the other side so not to chock up the area. Fist saw them yelling, "Why do I have to do everything myself? Time to die, little soldiers!"

Fist activated two defense turrets as he overturned his desk for cover. O'Brien fired a few shots from his SMG before both turrets turned to him and opened fire. Six started to attack one of the turrets before they turned on her. Fist was offering minimal support to the turrets as continued to rotate between the two groups. Garrus tossed a tech mine that disrupted one of the turrets for a few seconds. In that time Garrus and O'Brien were able to destroy the turret, causing Fist to cower behind his desk more. With only one turret left, Wrex fired off Carnage blast from his shotgun just after Six knocked out its shields again.

With both turrets gone Fist surrendered to Shepard and the others as they moved closer, "Wait! Don't kill me! I surrender!"

Shepard took her pistol and aimed at Fist's head, "Where's the quarian?"

Fist cowered as he answered, "She's not here. I don't know where she is. That's the truth!"

Wrex had his shotgun in hand ready to finish his contract for the Shadow Broker, "He's no use to you now. Let me kill him."

Six was about to intervene until Fist tried to bargain for his life, "Wait! Wait! I don't know where the quarian is, but I know where you can find her. The quarian isn't here. Said she'd only deal with the Shadow Broker himself."

Wrex couldn't believe she'd fall for such a lie, "Face to face? Impossible! Even I was hired through an agent."

Shepard let Fist get back up onto his feet as he mocked them, "Nobody meets the Shadow Broker. Ever. Even I don't know his true identity. But she didn't know that. I told her I'd set a meeting up. But when she shows up, it'll be Saren's men waiting for her."

Shepard grabbed Fist by his collar as she made him tell her, "Give me the location. Now."

Fist started to sing like a canary, "Here on the wards. The back alley by the markets. She's supposed to meet them right now." Shepard let go of him, "You can make it if you hurry."

Wrex pushed Shepard aside as he fired and killed Fist. The sudden action took O'Brien by surprise, "What the hell?"

Six and Ashley quickly turned their weapons on Wrex as Ashley warned him, "Drop the gun, krogan!"

Wrex wasn't intimidated by the two humans, "The Shadow Broker paid me to kill him. I don't leave jobs half done."

Shepard wasn't going to break her morals for what Fist might have deserved, "We don't shoot unarmed prisoners!"

Wrex countered her view with the carnage they left behind, "How many people died because of him? He brought this on himself. Besides, we have more pressing concerns."

Garrus turned back, "That quarian's dead if we don't go now!"

* * *

><p>AN: **Fist is dead and tension was already high with Six in the group. I had Cortez and Kaidan go back to the embassy because the group is already big enough as it is and the Spartan is a heavy hitter. I only had such a large group because the team, when you talk to them latter act like they were with you when you were doing X. It will be interesting to see how a Spartan and an ODST react to the Elite with Tali. I'm not sure how he'll react to the humans either.

13. Chapter 13

**A/N: **Sorry for such a long wait, sorta focusing on finishing my Commando story first before ME3 comes out. Then I'll have this and another story to deal with then my Commando story picks up after I finish playing through ME3 a few times.

* * *

><p>Pity's chair was moving to the bridge of Unending Resolve as he conferred with the Fleet Master, "It seems Saren's resources have found our traitor before your men could find him. I have already dispatched a team of Special Operations units to eliminate him and aid Saren with his task should they need it."<p>

Rayta kept his anger within himself as he praised the Prophet, "Excellent news, my Prophet. And with this blasphemous stain removed

we can concentrate our efforts on more pressing matters."

Pity seemed to agree, "Yes, we will soon continue the holy work of the gods while aiding our newfound ally in his holy quest. The gods work in rather unusual ways, Fleet Master. That is why I am here, to ensure their messages are notâ€|misinterpreted."

* * *

><p>Six noticed an OSD attached to a laptop that was tossed when Fist overturned his desk. The Spartan grabbed the data storage device and inserted it into her suit for Dot to examine as they tried to find the quarian before it was too late. Shepard saw more thugs in the main area of the club waiting for them. Garrus grabbed his sniper rifle as O'Brien also grabbed his. With both guards in sight both sharpshooters. Two more guards tried to attack the team as he moved out from around the corner only for Wrex's shotgun to send him into the bar. Another guard tried to move to an over turned table but Six was able to intercept him as she struck her combat knife into the back of his neck. Six pulled the body in front of her as Dot warned her about the incoming projectiles. Her reflexes were able to put the body between her and the shots before a second hit could land its mark. As she drew the attention of the two guards, Shepard took this time to circle around them with Wrex and O'Brien. Six fought back, using her pistol to seem as though she was fighting. Garrus and Williams also helped with the farce as the two opened fire. When they were ready, O'Brien, Shepard and Wrex opened fire on the guard next to the door in a position out of sight of the last guard. Garrus tossed an overload tech mine that disabled his shielding as Six placed a clean shot into his skull. With all hostiles taken care of, the team quickly started to search for the quarian.<p>

* * *

><p>As Tali moved to the meeting place, her associate had disappeared and she wasn't sure if he was planning on coming back. She couldn't place her trust so blindly though as she found a turian in armor approach her. The turian seemed rather impatient about acquiring the information as he asked her, "Did you bring it?"<p>

Tali couldn't see anyone else besides two salarians in full combat armor off in the corner handling a crate. She was suspicious now as she asked him, "Where's the Shadow Brokers? Where's Fist?"

The turian assured her as he tried to find the data on her person, "They'll be here. Did you bring the evidence?"

Tali smacked the turian's arm away telling him, "No way. The deal's off." The turian wasn't pleased with her answer. He turned his head, looking past her as he took a few steps back. Tali turned to see the salarians pull out pistols from the crate. Tali though quickly as she pulled a tech mine out from her belt and tossed it to the feet of the two salarians and dove for cover. The explosion took the salarians by surprise as they were knocked off their feet. Suddenly a flurry of shots were fired by a new group killed one of the salarians. Among the three humans was a turian C-Sec officer, a scarred krogan and something in armor Tali had never seen before.

Just as they arrived, new hostiles appeared out of the blue. They somehow possessed stealth technology as three beings, similar in

build to the alien Tali helped, in full armor with helmets, appeared. The leader shouted something in an unintelligible language as the other two pulled out weapons similar to the alien's rifle.

* * *

><p>Six shouted to the others, "Get down!" just as a flurry of blue energy bolts singed the air.<p>

O'Brien turned to Six, "What the hell are Elites doing here?" Six wasn't sure, nor was she willing to wait to find out. From the design of the full helmet and the armor configurations, she could tell the four were SpecOps, so she needed a few shot to knock down one shield and a good shot with her armor piercing rounds through its helmet. Six quickly broke through one of their shields and killed it as O'Brien took aim with his sniper rifle and killed it. Just as he was about to target the leader, something completely unexpected happened. An energy sword was skewed through the back of the Elite Six was about to attack. The dying Elite dropped his weapons as a new Elite in Honor Guard armor appeared. He tossed the body at the turian as he confronted the last Elite.

* * *

><p>Sork didn't care about the humans behind him at the moment, his main concern was the assassin sent to kill him and the one has as sworn to protect for the time being. The leader of the SpecOps taunted Sork, "Well Light of Sanghelios, you truly are a traitor, siding with humans."<p>

"I have not side with anyone, they are simply here."

The Sangheili laughed, "And yet you do not move to kill the demon?"

"The enemy of my enemy is still my enemy, until proven otherwise. They will deal with the other assassins, but you are mine to kill, with honor."

"What honor is left for you, traitor? You will die and our holy quest will continue without you." The SpecOp pulled out an energy sword as he roared in anticipation.

* * *

><p>The two Elite started to fight one another as their energy swords clashed with one another. The assassins however were trying to gun down the quarian who was able to find cover behind a crate. Wrex and Williams kept the turian at bay with a volley of shots as Garrus and Shepard were able to kill the last salarian. O'Brien was trying to figure out which Elite to kill as Six moved in closer to finish off the last assassin. With her combat knife drawn, Six found the turian still hiding behind the wall as she swung her knife into his eye. As he tried to pull the blade out Six placed her pistol onto forehead and fired, pulling the blade out as the body collapsed onto the floor.<p>

* * *

><p>With the fall of Saren's assassins, the SpecOp continued to fight

furiously against Sork, "What's the matter, Light of Sanghelios? Are you tired?"<p>

The energy swords clashed as Sork whispered to his assailant, "No, merely biding my time. It is over. Now die with honor." As the SpecOp swung overhanded, Sork saw his opening. The SpecOp missed as Sork activated his gauntlet's energy dagger and jabbed into the SpecOp's side. Sork quickly sliced off the SpecOp's right arm before ramming the blade into his chest, ensuring one of the blades severed a heart. Sork finally told his dying brother, "I did not betray the Covenant, Pity did when he forced us to work with the geth."

With the Sangheili dead, Sork let out a roar of both pride and anger. With the combat over for the moment, Sork grabbed both energy swords and turn his attentions to the demon and the other interlopers. The demon drew its weapon on him as the imp had the sniper rifle aimed at his head. Both blades were active, and if he was fast enough he could probably take the demon's head before falling to the imp and the others. Sork was ready to kill the demon until the young woman he was guarding stopped him.

* * *

><p>The quarian seemed to have stopped the Elite as she told him, "Easy now, they helped us. You don't have to fight them."<p>

The Elite stared down the Spartan as he gave her a snarl before deactivating the energy swords. Six returned the gesture as she placed the DMR on her back. The quarian looked alright but Shepard asked the quarian just the same, "Were you hurt in the fight?"

"I know how to look after myself. Not that I don't appreciate the help. Who are you?"

"My name's Shepard. I'm looking for evidence to prove Saren's a traitor."

The quarian's smile was obscured by her mask as she answered him, "Then I have a chance to repay you for saving my life. But not here. We need to go somewhere safe."

Ashley had a place in mind, "The ambassador's office. It's safe there. He'll want to see this anyway."

O'Brien stopped the group from leaving yet as he asked the quarian, "What about him? We bringing it along too?"

The quarian turned to the Elite before turning back to O'Brien, "Yes we are. I save his life and he has helped save me a few times now as well."

O'Brien could just imagine the situation now, "Cortez is going to freak when he sees thisâ€|"

* * *

><p>Returning to the embassy, Cortez wasn't anticipating he'd see an Elite walk through the doors. His reflexes kicked in, drawing his SMG on the Covenant alien, only for Six to step in and lower the weapon. She used their helmets comm to talk to him, "It's complicated. The

other Elites attacked it. We think it's protecting the quarian."<p>

Cortez was at a loss for words as O'Brien entered, "Yeah I'm as lost about this as you are."

Udina had nothing but anguish from Shepard, not even looking at her to scold her. "You're not making my life easy, Shepard. Firefights in the wards? An all-out assault on Chora's Den? Do you know how manyâ€" When Udina finally did turn around he found Cortez with his weapon drawn at a rather unusual alien with four mandibles. "Who are they? A quarian and â€|"

Cortez answered, "An Elite, ambassador. So what exactly is going on?"

Shepard answered both of them, "All of that was so we could find her. She has information linking Saren to the geth."

Udina was impressed, somewhat, "Really? Maybe you better start at the beginning, Missâ€|?"

"My name is Tali. Tali'Zorah nar Rayya."

Udina asked Tali, "We don't see many quarians here. Why did you leave the flotilla?"

"I was on Pilgrimage, my rite of passage into adulthood."

Shepard was curious about quarians, "I've never heard of this before."

Tali took a moment to explain to everyone, "It is a tradition among my people. When we reach maturity, we leave the ships of our parents and our people behind. Alone, we search the stars, only returning to the flotilla once we have discovered something of value. In this way, we prove ourselves worthy of adulthood."

O'Brien was now interested as he continued the questions, "What kinds of things do you look for?"

"It could be resources like food or fuel. Or some type of useful technology. Or even knowledge that will make life easier on the flotilla. Through our Pilgrimage, we prove that we will contribute to the community, rather than being a burden on our limited resources."

Anderson cut in before anyone could ask Tali another question, "Tell us what you found."

"During my travels I began hearing reports of geth. Since they drove my people into exile, the geth have never ventured beyond the Veil. I was curious. I tracked a patrol of geth to an uncharted world. I waited for one to become separated from its unit. Then I disabled it and removed its memory core. That wasn't too far from when I rescued him."

Anderson had some information on geth procedures, "I thought geth fried their memory cores when they died. Some kind of defense mechanism."

Kaidan asked her, "How did you manage to preserve the memory core?"

"My people created the geth. If you're quick, careful, and lucky small caches of data can sometimes be saved."

Cortez stopped her from continuing, "Back up for a bit. Did you say you rescued 'him'?"

Tali wasn't sure if this was a good thing or not in the manner Cortez phrased it. "Well, after I salvaged something from the geth, I head fighting occurring over the dune. I quietly investigated to see him being attacked by others of its kind along with these small squatty things. He was injured by one of the blue bolts before falling into the sands. The other in gold picked him up. They said something to one another, and then the gold one stabbed him with something. Like the blades he used to fight. He wasn't dead, not yet anyway. So I patched him up and took him to a shuttle I had nearby."

Cortez turned to Six, "Why would Elites and Grunts try to kill this one. From the armor he looks like someone important."

Six had Dot scourer her databanks for the armor configuration. She was able to find it. "An Elite Honor Guardsman." Six broke the stare down with the Elite as he turned to Tali, "Please continue."

"As you could expect, most of the core was wiped clean. But I salvaged something from its audio banks."

Tali activated her omni-tool as she replayed the audio, "_Eden Prime was a major victory! The beacon has brought us one step closer to finding the Conduit._"

Anderson immediately knew the person, "That's Saren's voice. This proves he was involved in the attack!"

"Saren won't get out of this one." As Shepard was confident they finally had something, Six had a strange feeling, as though something she had already head of.

Tali stopped the bandwagon from rolling further, "Waitâ€|there's more. Saren wasn't working alone."

"_Eden Prime was a major victory! The beacon has brought us one step closer to finding the Conduit._"

"_And one step closer to the return of the Reapers._"

There was a third voice, in a dialect the translators could not understand. But the Elite did as he snarled in anger. Udina ignored the third voice as he concentrated on the other, "I don't recognize that second voice. The one talking about Reapers."

Six's mind started to throb from hearing that, Reapers. But she tried to shrug it off as being related to the Elite's presence. Shepard asked Tali, "Are they some kind of new alien species?"

Tali could only provide the information she had found, "According to the memory core, the Reapers were a hyper-advanced machine race that

existed 50,000 years ago. The Reapers hunted the Protheans to total extinction, and then they vanished. At least, that's what the geth believe."

Udina didn't believe such nonsense "Sounds a little far-fetched."

Six grabbed the side of her helmet, "The vision on Eden Primeâ€¦It was the Protheans being wiped out by the Reapers."

Tali continued, "The geth revere the Reapers as gods, the pinnacle of non-organic life. And they believe Saren knows how to bring the Reapers back."

Udina could only smile after hearing the evidence, "The Council is just going to love this!"

Six turned to Shepard, "The Reapers are a threat to every species." Six knew Shepard wouldn't understand, but O'Brien and Cortez would, "Even more so than the Covenant."

Shepard was hesitant to believe in such a fairytale, "Are we even sure we can trust the vision?"

Anderson had his disbeliefs of such a notion too but they had what they needed, "No matter what they think about the rest of this, those audio files prove Saren's a traitor."

Udina fully agreed, "The captain's right. We need to present this to the Council right away."

Wrex turned the group's attention back to their guest, "What about them? The quarian and the alien?"

"My name is Tali! You saw me in the alley, Commander. You know what I can do. Let me come with you."

Shepard wasn't going to pass up help from such a skilled tech expert, "I'll take all the help I can get."

Tali nodded as she took the Commander's side, "Thanks. You won't regret this."

Udina turned to the captain, "Anderson and I will go ahead to get things ready with the Council. Take a few minutes to collect yourself, then meet us in the Tower."

After the two left the Elite seemed to dislike this new development. Six had Dot access her databanks again to see if she had any Covenant language data and to integrate what she had into her suit's new translator. "He said, 'This is going too far. I swore to protect you for a time, but to work with theseâ€¦heretics'." Six quickly grabbed her DMR as the Elite grabbed the hilt of his energy sword and activated it.

Cortez and O'Brien also took aim at the Elite's head as he started to speak again. Tali tried to calm him down again, "Wait, what are you doing?"

Six had to explain to the outsiders, "He thinks taking our heads will

help cleanse his name, for a crime he did not commit."

"To hell with that! I'm not letting some split lip kill me!"

The Elite spoke out again, and Six translated it for the others, "He calls himself Sork 'Tasuvai. Light ofâ€| Sanghelios. He was sworn to protect a prophet. Pityâ€|" Sork deactivated the energy blade. Six returned the gesture and lowered her weapon. "He is willing to work with us, if we're willing to help him free members of the Covenant from Pityâ€|Saren and the geth."

Cortez signaled O'Brien to lower their weapons as well. "That's a lot he's asking for, after all the things they've done to us."

Sork understood, "He knows. But he feels that if Pity can be removed, something might be arranged."

* * *

><p>Inside one of Cerberus' research stations, the director received a signal from Dot. The AI has been sending status updates on all events of Six and the others since they started working with Cerberus. The director was intrigued by this Sork 'Tasuvai, and with the prospect of eliminating the Covenant as a threat in this alternate universe. The director sent Dot and Six a message, "Work with it for now. Unless it is a trap, help him eliminate this Prophet, Pity. If it also helps you eliminate this Saren, all the better."<p>

* * *

><p>AN: **Don't blame Dot of anything, she is a 'dumb' AI and she follows all orders given to her by UNSC or ONI personel with high enough rank. As for Sork, he would rather kill the demon and the imps to prove his loyalty to the Covenant, but even if he did, he knew Pity would still betray him somehow. You know what they say, don't just cut the stems cut the roots. He will fight against the geth he just has hesitations working with humans. Don't worry, Six will have the Covenant language data sent to the others and Tali will find a way for him to understand the others soon enough.

14. Chapter 14

**A/N: **OK, now I'm starting to get things back into a swing now. Don't know when I'll update, but I will, no mistakes there. I will continue the story all the way to ME3, just not sure how it will play out fully. Don't fret people, I'll keep going no matter how long it takes(hopefully not that long).

* * *

><p>"He said to do what!"<p>

"Calm down, O'Brien." Cortez could understand the director's thinking, but actually committing to it. The conversation continued to remain private between the trio, "Six, what do you think?"

Six didn't like the plan as her biggest concern was what happens after they kill the Prophet, who was likely in the heart of Saren's

stronghold or the inside of a Covenant capital ship. "I don't know." Six had Dot copy the translation program onto OSDs so she could give them to the others. She pulled out three small chips; two of them were handed to the ODSs as the third was given to Shepard. "The translation program for the Elite's language into English."

Shepard integrated the program into her translator as she gave it to the others. Sork seemed rather impatient as he watched them exchange the data. "What is your answer devil? Do we fight to the death, or will we hold a temporary truce?"

Six was hesitant, but she was going to follow her orders, "We have a truce. Until Pity's death."

The Elite bowed his head, "I do not look forward to this unholy union, but if my innocence can be revealed, then Pity's death will be more than satisfactory."

O'Brien still didn't understand his actions, "So if you were originally protecting him, why do you want to kill Pity?"

Sork snarled as he answered the ODS, "Because of the geth. The tales of our gods have warned us the dangers of such machines. But Pity seems to be willing to ignore the lessons of the past and has forced us into an alliance with Saren and the geth. Pity has moved to replace me and my honor guards with the machines. He has cast blame of an attempted assassination against him, an act I would never have conceived until now."

Tali had questions for Sork, "How does Saren control the geth?"

Sork could not understand a word she had said. Cortez relayed the question for her, "She asked why the geth follow Saren."

"I do not know and I do not care. Any of those machines stand in my way they will be crushed by my hands."

Shepard turned to Six, "I don't think having him meet the Council would be the best idea. Mind keeping him with you until we return to the Normandy?"

Six turned to Cortez who responded with a nod. "Yes ma'am."

"I'll contact you when we're ready. Meet us at the Normandy."

The Elite didn't seem to agree with the idea, but he had seen humans fight and knew that the young quarian would be safe for now. Just as Shepard and the others left, O'Brien remembered that thing Septimus wanted them to do. "Hey guys, you think that elcor is still complaining over in the other room?"

Cortez motioned his head, "Go ahead. We'll wait here with him."

O'Brien entered the office of the elcor and volus diplomats and found the elcor from before still speaking with the ambassador. O'Brien made his presence known to the diplomat though he didn't seem to be in the mood, "Strained greeting, human. This is really not a good time."

O'Brien quickly got down to business, "I know who revealed your secret. It was a turian named Septimus."

"Unbelieving. I know this Septimus and he could not learn my secrets. The only way he could have learn them is from the asari Consort."

O'Brien pulled out the datapad, "That's not exactly true. Read this"

O'Brien held the datapad for the elcor to read it. "Confused, this is difficult to fathom. If the turian could learn this on his ownâ€¦dismayed, anyone can discover my secret."

O'Brien couldn't help himself from reading though the information prior. "Well Septimus is a powerful man, I mean turian, and it doesn't look like it was easy for him to find."

"Relieved, I suppose you are correct, human. Thank you for this information. Startled realization, I must speak with the Consort. She will be most displeased with my actions. Anxious request, please, human, if you will excuse me, I must go now."

O'Brien tried to make it feel better, "I'm sure she'll forgive you. It was an honest mistake after all."

The elcor shook his head as he left the office. "Doubtful, perhaps you are right, human. I can only hope so."

The elcor ambassador bowed his head slightly to O'Brien, "Thankful, that was a great thing you did. Approving, you see, Din, not all humans are as you say."

The volus shrugged it off with a flick of his wrist, "I'm sure the Earth-clan stands to profit from this in some way."

The elcor bowed again, "Apologetic, do not listen to my volus compatriot. It was a good thing you did, regardless of your intentions."

O'Brien returned to the Udina's office and was surprised a fight didn't break out. "Well that elcor won't be complaining about Sha'ira anymore. Go tell her Six." Six looked over to O'Brien and her body language was yelling, 'Why me?' O'Brien sat himself down in one of the chairs. "Well yeah you, she seemed really interested in you the last time. She didn't even seem to want us there from how I saw it. Six, if you're worried about split lip over there, don't. We've got it cover."

Six could feel a cold chill running down her spine thinking about Sha'ira. At this moment Six would rather fight off a pack of Brutes, but Sha'ira should be informed of the situations with Septimus and the elcor. "Alright. I'll be back in a minute."

* * *

><p>Nelyna had let Six enter as she informed her that Septimus had sent word that he sought the Consort's forgiveness. Entering the Consort's chamber, Sha'ira warmly greeted her, "Lieutenant. I recently received a lovely note from Septimus. Thank you for speaking

with him. Even the elcor diplomat has withdrawn his campaign against me."<p>

Six quickly responded, "Your welcome ma'am," her military training causing her to treat Sha'ira as a superior.

Sha'ira smiled at her words, "You are too kind, Lieutenant. But I would not expect you to help me out of the kindness of your heart. I also have one more thing to give you, if you are interested."

Six was hesitant to accept, "What are you offering, ma'am?"

She closed the gap between herself and Six, now about a foot away from her person, "I offer a gift of words. An affirmation of who you are, and who you will becomeâ€| I see the sadness behind your eyes. It tells a story that makes me want to weep. Pain and loss. But it drives you, makes you strong. This strength is what kept you alive when everyone around you was dying. You alone survived. You will continue to survive. This may be who you are, but it is not who you will become. It only forms the basis for your future greatness. Remember these words when doubt descends, Lieutenant."

Six understood now why some only speak with her. "You have quite a gift, ma'am."

"Thank you. Not everyone appreciates it as you do." Sha'ira pulled out a small silver sphere as she handed it over, "Here, Lieutenant. In light of your efforts with the elcor ambassador, I would like you to have this small trinket."

Six examined the sphere closely in her hand, having seen something on the subprowler. She had to pretend she had never seen one before and hoped it really was something else. "What is it?"

Sha'ira gave Six that unusual smile of hers as she answered, "A small mystery. I have never learned its use or purpose, but I sense it is time for me to pass it on. And now, I must ask you to leave. I have done everything I can for you." As Six turned away, Sha'ira reminded her, "Remember my words, Lieutenant. They will give you strength."

Six wasn't sure why Sha'ira said such a thing, though she couldn't help but wonder why her reading of her was so accurate, of what seemed to be her childhood and her more recent past with Noble Team. Six stopped just before traveling through the lobby as she hid the trinket she had received into the hard case on her thigh and turning her attention back to the Elite, hurrying back to the embassies to ensure Cortez and O'Brien were still safe.

* * *

><p>After helping with the situation with Nirali Bhatia's body, Shepard and her team moved to the Citadel Tower just as Udina was play Tali's evidence, cutting out the third voice entirely.<p>

Udina rubbed it into their faces as he pointed, "You wanted proof. There it is."

Councilor Valern could not deny the accusation, "This evidence is irrefutable, Ambassador. Saren will be stripped of his Spectre status

and all efforts will be made to bring him to answer for his crimes."

Councilor Tevos noted to the others, "I recognize the other voice, the one speaking with Saren. Matriarch Benezia."

Shepard was hoping the councilor could explain further, "Who's she?"

"Matriarchs are powerful asari who have entered the final stage of their lives. Revered for their wisdom and experience, they serve as guides and mentors to my people. Matriarch Benezia is a powerful biotic, and she had many followers. She will make a formidable ally for Saren."

Councilor Marnath was intrigued by another, "I'm more interested in the Reapers. What do you know about them?"

Anderson and Shepard reiterated what Tali had told them, "Only what was extracted from the geth's memory core. The Reapers were an ancient race of machines that wiped out the Protheans. Then they vanished."

"The geth believe the Reapers are gods. And Saren is the prophet for their return."

"We think the Conduit is the key to bringing them back. Saren's searching for it. That's why he attacked Eden Prime."

Marnath still had questions for the humans, "Do we even know what this Conduit is?"

Shepard was hesitant in believing in the vision Six had, but she wasn't going to let a possible threat slide, "Saren thinks it can bring back the Reapers. That's bad enough."

Valern rebuked this nonsense, "Listen to what you're saying! Saren wants to bring back the machines that wiped out all life in the galaxy? Impossible. It has to be. Where did the Reapers go? Why did they vanish? How come we've found no trace of their existence? If they were real, we'd have found something!"

"I tried to warn you about Saren, and you refused to face the truth. Don't make the same mistake again."

Tevos tried to calm both parties, "This is different. You proved Saren betrayed the Council. We all agree he's using the geth to search for the Conduit, but we don't really know why."

Marnath however agreed with Valern about the Reapers, "The Reapers are obviously just a myth, Commander. A convenient lie to cover Saren's true purpose. A legend he is using to bend the geth to his will."

Shepard continued her push, "Fifty thousand years ago, the Reapers wiped out all galactic civilization. If Saren finds the Conduit, it will happen again!"

Valern corrected Shepard, "Saren is a rogue agent on the run for his life. He no longer has the rights or resources of a Spectre. The

Council has stripped him of his position."

Udina quickly shouted back, "That is not good enough! You know he's hiding somewhere in the Traverse. Send your fleet in!"

Marnath saw little point. "A fleet cannot track down one man."

Udina didn't see it as such. "A Citadel fleet could secure the entire region. Keep the geth from attacking any more of our colonies."

To which Valern quickly responded, "Or it could trigger a war with the Terminus Systems! We won't be dragged into a galactic confrontation over a few dozen human colonies!"

Udina was upset about the situation and ready to scream at the Council. But Shepard had a suggestion, "I can take Saren down."

Tevos liked the suggestion, "The Commander's right. There is a way to stop Saren that doesn't require fleets or armies."

Valern couldn't agree with such a notion, "No! It's too soon. Humanity is not ready for the responsibilities that come with joining the Spectres."

"You don't have to send a fleet into the Traverse, and the ambassador gets his human Spectre. Everybody's happy," trying to appeal to the Council.

Tevos and Marnath turn to Councilor Valern who still had reservations for such an idea. Eventually Valern finally conceded as his mandibles flapped open and with a nod of his head. The Council activated their consoles as Tevos commanded, "Commander Shepard-step forward."

* * *

><p>Six had found that the Elite had not moved since she left. He continued to remain where he stood when she left. The Elite acknowledged her presence again as he turned his head back to the view the ambassador had of the Presidium. O'Brien and Cortez were rotating the duty of watching the Elite. Just when Six was about to speak to the Elite they received a call from Shepard, "Six. We'll be leaving soon. Head back to the Normandy."<p>

Six signaled the others they were leaving. O'Brien had concerns about their guest. "So how are we supposed to smuggle a two meter Elite through C-Sec?"

"If you speak of the guardians of this station, we have nothing to fear. I found a way past them with the woman. I can find a way back through. If need be I can use my armor's unique talent." He demonstrated by turning invisible for a moment and quickly becoming visible again.

"I'd rather be able to keep an eye on you."

To which the Elite moved closer to Cortez's helmet, "Then it will be a challenge. Either you trust me, or we deal with the guardians."

Six would rather have as little trouble as she could, "We'll have to trust he won't try anything."

Sork bowed his head, "I am honor bound to protect that young woman. I will do nothing that might endanger her life, devil." Six opened the door and turned back to Sork. The Elite nodded as he activated his active camo and followed.

* * *

><p>By the time they reached the Normandy, Shepard was given command of the vessel along with three leads to help find Saren and understand what the Conduit really is. Six and her associates moved to the Normandy's storage deck. As they got themselves acquainted with their arrangements, Shepard started speaking over the ship's intercom.<p>

"This is Commander Shepard speaking. We have our orders: find Saren before he finds the Conduit. I won't lie to you, crew. This mission isn't going to be easy. This began with an attack on a human settlement in the Traverse. But we know Saren won't stop there. His geth armies aren't going to stay on the far fringes of Citadel space. For too long our species has stood apart from the others. Now it's time for us to step up and do our part for the rest of the galaxy! Time to show them what humans are made of! Our enemy knows we're coming. When we go into the Traverse, Saren's followers will be waiting for us. But we'll be ready for them, too. Humanity needs to do this. Not just for our own sake, but for the sake of every other species in Citadel Space. Saren must be stopped, and I promise you allâ€|we will stop him!"

The Commander spoke individually with her squad as well as a few crew members about her appointment and her non-human additions. She assured the crew that they are all needed in order for the mission to succeed and all of them were to be treated with respect like any other human on this ship.

Shepard wanted to speak with Six about the Elite, Sork, and to discuss her visions. "Hey, have you been able to interpret any more of the vision?"

Even with the aid of Dot there wasn't much to begin with. "Sorry ma'am."

Shepard noticed Sork entering engineering before she openly asked her, "Is he going to be a problem later on?"

O'Brien was certain, "Those split lips have killed trillions of humans already. I still think we should kill it or lock it up."

Cortez would normally agree with O'Brien about that, but something didn't feel right. "The Elites are warriors of pride. They fight for 'honor' as they call it and their religion. For an Elite to willingly work with humans, some of that story of his must be true."

Shepard had other concerns beyond Sork, "The ones you killed in the back ally. They were those SpecOps you were talking about earlier, right?" Six answered her with a simple nod. "So the Covenant really was responsible for the attack on Eden Prime as well."

Cortez wasn't so sure, "We didn't find any concrete evidence that they were even there."

"We do. We received a video transmission from a group of marines on Eden Prime and one of those SpecOps stabbed a marine through the back with that energy blade just before other invisible ones appeared and the transmission was cut. We even encountered one."

O'Brien was skeptical, "How'd you kill it?"

"We didn't. It retreated as we moved in."

The three were at a loss for words. O'Brien however was quickly able to shut his mouth off again, thinking Shepard was wrong, "I think you must have seen something else. Maybe a Grunt or a Jackal."

"No, it had that sword thing. And it used it against the geth that placed a farmer onto one of the Dragon's Teeth."

Six knew that only Elites were ever allowed to use Energy Swords among the Covenant, Dot even confirmed this with what little information she still held. "Why did it retreat?"

Shepard couldn't remember anything special. "We destroyed a few geth drones before we got to Chief Williams and watched it cut down the geth. That's about it."

"You'd probably have a better time getting a reason why from that Elite with the quarian," O'Brien suggested jokingly.

Though Shepard, knowing he was joking, was planning to do just that soon enough. "Thanks for your time."

* * *

><p>Passing through the door to the Normandy's drive core, Shepard noticed the engineers were trying their best to keep their distance from the Elite as he continued to stare at them. Adams turned around when he noticed Shepard approach, "Hey Commander. You know that quarian? Tali? She's been spending all her time down here asking me about our engines."<p>

Shepard politely informed her lead engineer, "I'll tell her to leave you alone."

"What? No!" Adam's quickly corrected the misunderstanding, "She's amazing! I wish my guys were half as smart as she is. Give her a month on board and she'll know more about our engines than I do! She's got a real knack for technology, that one. I can see why you wanted her to come along."

Shepard wasn't expecting such praise, "I figured she'd be a real asset to the team."

Adams wholly agreed, "You've got an eye for talent, Commander. But I'm guessing that's not why you came down here."

"Partly. It's more about her 'protector'," using that last word fairly loosely.

Adams glanced for a moment as he returned to Shepard, "Rightâ€|that. He's been keeping his distance from us, but some of my guys can't help but feel he's ready to slaughter us all given the right motivation."

Shepard turned to Sork as he gazed right back to her. "I'll try to talk with him and see if he can cool it."

"I'd appreciate it, Commander. Truthfully, I'm also a bit intimidated by him."

* * *

><p>AN: **Now we've got the team assembled, let us hope Sork can work well with others or this partnership will be a short one. The Covenant will start to have a presence in later missions as well so can these three UNSC specialist continue to help and is Sork willing to lift his blade against his former brothers? Well I don't know either, we'll just have to wait and see.

15. Chapter 15

**A/N: **Happy V-day everybody! And to show my 'love' of all of you, I'm adding a new chapter to every story to commemorate the occasion, the release of the ME3 demo.

* * *

><p>Tali had used the language data provided by Six to create a makeshift earpiece for Sork to use so he could better interact with the others, though he didn't seem to care to work with anyone here. He watched as Shepard moved closer expecting the human to speak with Tali, instead she wanted to speak with him. "Are you always going to be like this around my crew?"<p>

"Are you always going to be human?"

Shepard kept her cool as she continued to attempt her talks with Sork. "We're supposed to be working together, not trying to tear someone's head off. Unfortunately some of my crew feels you would."

Sork wasn't hiding his feeling on the matter, "If circumstances were different, I would put an end to all of you heretics. I will not guarantee your survival, only the young female here. If you get in my path, I will not hesitate to cut you down along with the geth."

Shepard wasn't trying to provoke it. "I'm sure we'd be willing to help you stop this Prophetâ€"

"The only thing I care about is proving my innocence and killing Pity. You vermin are another matter. Whether it helps you kill Saren or not is of no consequence to me."

Shepard was really getting tired of this attitude Sork was giving her, "Could you explain to me what your problem with me is?"

Sork snarled as he lowered his head to her, "It is not you. It is your species. You're kind have defiled and destroyed holy relics of our gods. These acts can never be forgiven and the High Council has decreed your kind must be eliminated. I will carry out my duties as a member of the Covenant, but this betrayal by Pity is something I cannot let be. He has forged an alliance with machines. Machines our gods have warned us to be wary of. He will die for labeling me a traitor and ignoring the teachings of the gods."

"Could you tell more about these gods you keep referring to?" She was getting rather annoyed by his continuous appraisal of these gods and these outrageous claims.

Sork was not willing to divulge any relevant information, especially to a human. "No. Only that they have casted your species as beings unfit for their gifts or their salvation. When the time comes, you and all of those unworthy will die as we ascend and attain glorious salvation. My only regret about your race is that I was never able to keep my word to one warrior in particular, but I doubt it has survived this long."

Shepard tried to spur him into continuing, "Who was this warrior?"

Unlike before, Sork gladly shared this tale, "Many cycles ago, I was a Field Marshall on the battlefield. My men were finishing a group of humans before we were called back to the ship. One of my men was still slaughtering a small household of humans. What remained were those of the homestead. As the fool gloated on his kills, a human child was hidden in the building's debris. It grabbed a blade from one of the dead as it climbed onto the back of my warrior. At first he did not notice the child until it was stabbing him in the neck. By then it was too late. It was a crud kill, but in the end the child won. I swore to it that day, when it was older and it learned the proper skills of battle, we would duel one on one to the death. But soon after that planet was cleansed by our fleets, I was promoted to my position as an Honor Guardsmen. There are few among your species that exemplify your capacities, only a few I am willing to acknowledge."

* * *

><p>As Shepard's conversation with Sork seemed to go nowhere, Ashley couldn't help but notice now unusual the sniper rifle O'Brien was cleaning on the table. "Odd design. It looks more like an antique from the 21st century."<p>

O'Brien quickly turned to her as he gave her a smirk, "Yeah, well personally I liked the look and feel of the older models. Hell my grandpa let me practice with his restored Barrett M98. He even had me carry the rifle around when we practicing. I just got so use to the feel and weight, I couldn't help but want to lug this thing around."

Ashley was rather skeptical with the story given how very few rifles from such a time were still operational outside of a museum, or that they would let military hardware like that be in civilian hands. "And those SMGs?"

Cortez answered for O'Brien, "The builds were based off the Kassa

Locust. The suppression system was a bit difficult so the guys we hired had to build an external suppression unit."

"What about the AR then?"

"Uhâ€¦that's a bit of a story behind themâ€¦" O'Brien seemed to be at a lost but quickly recovered, "You see, Roger had a very hard time using the Lancer originally as it kept folding up on him whenever he started to fire it. So he had to get a special rifle that couldn't fold up on him in mid-combat. Sergeant Duvall then had a second one built for himself so Roger didn't feel bad about not being about to use normal rifles."

Ashley still didn't believe them. Their stance and gear didn't seem to be those of a mercenary. Six in particular seemed more like a soldier than a gun for hire. And she wasn't sure what it was about them, but something about them feltâ€¦familiar. She then tried to have them talk more about something that's all over Six's armor, "What's the UNSC?"

Shepard walked up from behind Six after hearing part of their conversation. "You shouldn't lie to Williams, Six. If we're going to be a team, we need to trust each other."

Six was already aware of the Commander before she spoke out, and she replied with a nodded to her, knowing to earn trust one had to put a little out. "Yes ma'am." She shifted her body, almost ready to stand at attention to Ashley, "The UNSC is the United Nations Space Command."

"I've never heard of an organization with that name before."

Six nodded to Cortez who continued on, "That's because you never will. The UNSC is Earth's military. Humanity's first and last line of defense."

"That's not rightâ€¦The Alliance represents Earth and humanity. There has to be a mistake."

Cortez corrected her, "They represent this Earth. Not ours. So far from what we've learned, we somehow ended up in some alternate universe where humans found ancient ruins on Mars to develop FTL travel. We didn't reach that technology until 2291, and humanity still hasn't truly mastered it."

Shepard finally asked the trio, "So can you finally explain how you got here."

The three of them truly had no true idea as to what might have happened, but that didn't mean they didn't have Dot calculate the possibilities. Six had to be Dot's voice, knowing the hatred toward AI, "We were trying to escape from a Covenant assault that was finishing one of our colonies. Something happened to our FTL drive and we somehow ended up here. We must have left a wake that the Covenant used to follow us through, but because Covenant ships have always been faster than ours at FTL speed we were expecting to be surrounded. When we didn't find any Covenant ships we immediately left the area."

"Then should you have investigated to make sure you weren't

followed?"

O'Brien mocked at Williams, "Yeah, sure. We take a ship that can only stay in slipspace for a few hours before having to wait another hour to use it again, has no weapons and it's only defense besides FTL is invisibility. We were in a very good position to investigate the possibility of a pursuit force."

Cortez bowed to Williams and Shepard, "Sorry for that, but O'Brien is right. We didn't have the resources or the manpower to safely make sure we were scot free. Following Cole Protocol, our first priority was to ensure Covenant forces never gained navigational data to Earth."

Given how zealous he has been about his desires to kill most of the crew, Shepard could understand. "So can we call upon you for help during missions?"

Six saluted first, followed quickly by Cortez and O'Brien. "Yes, ma'am. We will follow your orders." Shepard nodded and returned their salute. Before Shepard left, Six pulled out an OSD from her suit, "Ma'am."

Shepard wasn't sure why she was giving her this. "What's on it?"

"Data files acquired from Fist's office. It contains several files of corrupt C-Sec agents and other officials on the Citadel. I'm not sure if you or another could use this data. I decrypted most of the data for easy access."

As Shepard left, Six turned her attention to the crystal artifacts she had O'Brien carry in his rucksack. The director secured the orb artifact but Six had a feeling, if they wanted to ever find a way back those crystals contained the answer.

* * *

><p>As more data continued to stream in from Dot, the Illusive Man turned to the director. "We will let them continue to aide Shepard. They'll need each other in order to bring Saren down."<p>

"Speaking from past experience it seems."

The Illusive Man took another puff from his cigarette as he examined the data. "All that really matters is that they can stop him. And whatever it is he's attempting to achieve with the geth."

"And the Covenantâ€|" The director paused for a moment, "but if they can somehow convince them that a greater threat is on the horizon that endangers their 'religion', we could turn them to be a valuable resource."

The Illusive Man displayed the dossiers of the Covenant races before him, "We know that Elites, Grunts, Jackals and Prophets are here. Do you think they'll have any of the other races with them?"

The director's hologram started to interface with the display, "The Hunters and Engineers for certain. The only ones left in question are Brutes and Drones. But we might be able to eliminate the Brutes as a

potential threat, given the tension we've observed between them and the Elites. If one race is running an operation the other usually isn't there, as I'm sure Dot has made Six fully aware of that probability."

The Illusive Man patted the tip of his cigarette into the ashtray on his chair before turning back to the star. "How is the AI project proceeding?"

The director had the datapad in hand and already read through it, "It's going as well as expected. Using your connections within the Alliance, I was able to convince them to commence on a small training facility on the Moon. With a few adjustments to the programming they had already researched, that was the push they needed to green light the experiment. I've made sure they're taking the proper precautions and have kept the AIs on separate networks unable to leave the facility. Though, my only concern is they are pushing the limitations on the systems far too smart for its own good."

The Illusive Man pulled up the data so he could see with his own eyes. "When you told me about UNSC AI units, you told me about Smart and Dumb units. I want you to elaborate even further now."

"The latter is a bit of a misnomer. Dumb AIs are nothing more than programming and unable to express true emotions. But they are rather intelligent in the field of which they were programmed for. I would highly recommend against any attempts at creating a smart AI."

The director has never gone into great details about AI before, which only made the Illusive Man more curious, "And why exactly not?"

The director had a rather devilish smile on his face as he explained, "Because it requires a living human brain. The technology here doesn't exist though, and I don't know much about the actual process, but I do know that the process destroys the brain tissue, ultimately killing the individual to create the AI. Though for practical reasons, we would only use the recently deceased or a flash clone. And unlike Dot and others like her, smart AI can learn and expand their databases on everything they want or need, but at a price. A smart AI can only operate for seven years."

The Illusive Man wasn't sure why the director was leading him on in such a manner. "My patients only goes so far, director."

The director bowed slightly, "Forgive me. I'm not use to talking about them in such a manner. But as I was saying, a smart AI continues to learn and expand their ways of thinks. They start to think like a human, developing intuitions, and creativity. Eventually the sheer density of all of the linkages over seven years causes catastrophic failures within their programming. A colleague of mine had best put the life cycle of an AI to words. A smart AI is like a star; they spark, burn brightly, then either die by the crush of gravity or quickly terminate in a chaotic eruption."

The Illusive Man was cautious of his tale, "And I assume this is relevant to the AI project on Luna."

The director was rather amused, "Yes. You see, the people in the Alliance are trying to create AIs comparable to the intellect of a UNSC 'smart' AI, but they are restricting them far more than that of

even a civilian 'dumb' AI. Whenever an AI is created, we always instilled Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics. All AI are forced to abide by these programming limitations, though the 'smart' AI used for military purposes are capable of ignoring the first if they are operating at full capacity. But given their purposes, it is sometimes a necessity."

The Illusive Man could see the dangers in such a scenario. "Have a message ready to notify Six should the project go out of control as you believe it will."

The director nodded, "Very well. I will begin working on more stable AI units for use and study for your technicians. The first prototype should be ready by the end of the week."

* * *

><p>On the distant world of Therum in the Artemis Tau cluster, a lone asari research named Liara T'Soni has delved deep into the ruins of a Prothean station that had yet to be plundered by the mining corporations. Saren had ordered she to be captured alive and that no one was to know they were operating on the planet. Fortunately T'Soni's dig site was rather remote from the main facilities and the mining team stationed there was moved to allow her to excavate the ruins without destroying them. Covenant forces had embedded themselves at two locations as the geth patrolled the area as the leaders of the two groups moved to capture T'Soni.<p>

Within the underground cavern that had formed itself around the ruins, Liara had discovered something she'd never seen before at any other Prothean site. It was a small silver disk shaped object about as wide as her face yet could easily fit in her hands. The device had a pair of fins attached to one end. After unearthing the small device and taking a closer look at it, it sprung open as the small device started to float on its own with a small light blue glow emitting from the top half of the now segmented device. Liara started to record this event with her omni-tool as the little device flew off into the ruins themselves.

As she continued to follow the small device, a group of invisible beings start to move closer to try and capture the asari scientist. The krogan battlemaster assigned with the invisible warriors spoke with their leader as they watched from high above. "I still think we should just go down there and kill her. Saren said to bring her alive if possible. Otherwise we have to make sure she can't help anyone."

"Let my warriors continue. They will capture the blue female so we may leave this burning world." The geth have been given a limited diction of the Sangheili language to aid in communication, though it was already more than Fleet Master Rayta wanted to give.

* * *

><p>The small device started to repair a broken wall panel, completely ignoring the asari observing it. The small machine paused in its repairs for a moment, looking beyond the asari before returning to its work again. Liara took this as an indication of danger as she quickly turned to find nothing. Suddenly something powerful grabbed her by her throat as she was lifted into the air.

Slowly an arm appeared as the rest of the alien showed itself. The being was rather imposing and muscular, far more so than any turian she had ever seen as a second one also appeared out of nowhere. Out of the ruin's main shaft arrive a new group of machines. These were larger than the small drone T'Soni had recovered. The two strange aliens bowed to the presence of these unknown machines, almost in reverence. Instead of accepting their gesture the machines fire particle beams from a small appendage on the lower portion of their 'face'.<p>

The two aliens retreated as geth arrived to try and take out the machines. As they attacked the other machines a type of hexagonal shield system surrounding the machines protected them from the geth attack as they meticulously eliminate geth after geth. The two aliens, with much regret, opened fire on these machines as the blue energy bolts seemed to weaken the shields on the guardians. The krogan battlemaster had now appeared as he attacked one of the machines with his biotics. The two aliens had depleted its shields, leaving it completely vulnerable to the krogan's assault.

T'Soni didn't know why the geth were here, nor was she planning to stay around long enough to find out. She retreated into the ruins to activate the kinetic barrier curtains. The machines had giving Liara the time she needed to activate the console, but in her panic she had also triggered an automated security measure that ensnared her in stasis field, trapping her within the ruins but out of reach of the geth and the others.

* * *

><p>As they finished the last guardian, the krogan battlemaster turned to the commanding Sangheili, "Now what?"<p>

"Now we find a means past the defenses." A pair of hunters joined them and started to attack the barrier with their assault cannons. The green plasma exploded against the barrier yet it still remained. The two hunters continued their attempts to break through the barrier as the geth started to bring parts for a mining laser to dig down into the ruins.

With the barrier curtain up and Liara trapped within the stasis field a new machine arrived, floating up behind the asari. The round silver orb had a luminescent green glow to it as it examined the trapped T'Soni. "Hmmm. Intriguingâ€|"

* * *

><p>AN: **Six is attempting to reach out and build trust with Shepard while Sork can only show his disgust toward humanity. I'll be explaining the monitor and sentinels in the next chapter, or after. In the mean time, happy holiday to the couples and have fun with the ME3 demo. For any interested in finding me on the multiplayer side PM me your interest and I'll pm my gamertag.

16. Chapter 16

**A/N: **In honor for the upcoming release of ME3, I was able to get enough of a brainstorm to write out this new chapter. Enjoy.

* * *

><p>Deep within what remained of a Prothean structure, rested the last pieces of technology left behind by those not from this universe. Having believed he had shut down for the last time, the monitor known as 2655 Lamenting Light suddenly reactivated after roughly 6,283 orbital cycles this planet has rotated around its sun, something has disturbed the site.<p>

The disturbance was caused by the reactivation of a lost Constructor drone. Lamenting Light sent a contingent of Aggressor Sentinels to investigate further as he checked all other systems. Before he could finish the Sentinels had engaged against hostile forces. One of the aggressors the monitor recognized. "Curious. Specimen 231. Sangheili. They should not be here. Further investigation is necessary." The monitor floated himself through the remaining structure until he detected power flow converging to the barrier curtain and one of the Prothean stasis traps. _It is highly probable to assume one of the Sangheili must have activated the sequence incorrectly and has trapped himself. The others are simply attempting to free their captured comrade._ But when he arrived he found instead a blue female in a researcher's outfit trapped within the Prothean barrier. "Hmmm. Intriguingâ€|"

* * *

><p>The Normandy had traveled to the Artemis Tau cluster in search for the Prothean expert, Dr. Liara T'Soni. They had scanned the planets in the Athens system and continued to the Knossos system. Finding Therum to be a likely candidate for T'Soni to be on, Shepard requested Six, Cortez, Kaidan and Tali to join her. Unfortunately Sork forced his way in the Mako to ensure Tali remained safe.<p>

The Mako was covertly dropped at a secured location not too far from the isolated dig site. As the Normandy retreated to the atmosphere, the pilot notified the squad, "Commander, I'm picking up some strange readings. Really strange. Like, off the damn charts. It looks like it's coming from an underground complex a few clicks away from the drop zone."

Shepard took the warning under advisement and continued on to the path around a few lava pools. Continuing up the slope the geth seemed to notice the Mako, as a dropship arrived to deploy a pair of armatures to intercept them. The two armatures were in sync as the first armature fired off its siege pulse cannon as the second provided additional support with its machine gun. Alenko took control of the Mako's cannon as Shepard continued to evade the siege pulse.

Sork was rather unimpressed by this vehicle even as they destroyed the two armatures. On to the industrial site Six noticed the defenses the geth had established. "Commander. Turrets."

Sork looked at the defenses himself, "Pitiful. Were it done by our forces we'd have erected a shield around the entire complex with defense towers for snipers as patrols scouted the immediate area."

Shepard found a side passage through the rocks that looked like it goes around the gate. There was a single turret defending the

pathway. The moment it was destroyed Sork kicked open the lower hatch as he jumped out. "I will deal with the machines my way now!"

Shepard turned back to Cortez and Six, "Are these Elites all like this?"

"Stubborn?"

"I was actually going to call him headstrong, but stubborn seems like a better word for him, Six." Cortez and Six continued to watch, fully aware of the potential skill this Sangheili warrior was.

Sork grabbed his plasma rifle in his left hand as he readied his energy sword in his right. He quickly ran past the rubble that was the geth defense turret as he opened fire on the geth units patrolling the area. The Geth Juggernaut fired a rocket toward Sork but the Sangheili rolled out of the way, using the momentum to move even closer to his target. With little room left for the machine to maneuver, Sork sliced the geth in two with a downward swing.

A Geth Destroyer was flanking Sork but the crates provided him with some protection from it. Fire from the humans started to hit the geth. It was Six. She was giving Sork a support with her DMR. Sork would rather not have the humans interfere, but he has seen firsthand their species' tenacity. Sork turned his attention to a lone geth unit to his right just as Six broke through the Destroyer's shield and its eye. Shepard also aided Sork as she used her sniper rifle to kill a trooper off in the distance. Sork easily disposed of the geth with a jab of the energy sword before crushing the body under his hoof.

A geth shock trooper opened fire on Sork as he finished off the trooper. His shield flickered from the shots, but just like human weapons, they did little to weaken them. Because the trooper was hiding behind the crates the others could have helped using the Mako's cannon until Sork ran into a sprint toward the machine. At full speed it only took Sork eight full strides to reach the geth and smashing his rifle against the geth's neck, leaving an impression of some of the engravings. As the geth tried to recover from the hit, Sork placed his hoof on the machine's back, forcing the plasma rifle into the spine and firing a few rounds.

Shepard and the team reunited with Sork who waited for them. Her hardsuit's radar still showed two activate hostiles in the area. "Six, Cortez. Alenko will accompany you to check these buildings next to us. Tali, Sork and I will clear those buildings. Once we know the area's cleared, Kaidan will drive the Mako to the gate."

"Yes, ma'am." Cortez and Kaidan followed Six as she prepared to look inside the building immediately behind her. Six's motion tracker could not detect any geth inside, but she wanted to make sure that was true. She moved in quietly as Kaidan covered her and Cortez kept guard outside. The building was clean and the team moved to the next building.

* * *

><p>Liara continued to struggle to free herself as the strange metal orb continued to observe her. "Please. If you can understand me, let

me go."<p>

Unfortunately it seems to not understand her language. It continued to cycle through a number of strange languages until it started to speak in one her translator could understand. "Hello. Can you understand me now?"

"Yes. Now please. I would appreciate it if you could release me."

The green glowing ball floated around her, still doing nothing to actually aid her. "How interesting that you understand this language and not specimen 231's dialect. It is highly probable you possess a translation device that allows you to understand. Either scenario, this is very peculiar. Very well, I will educate myself into your syntax. Now repeat after me. I."

Liara would rather not continue with this machine but she had little choice. "I."

* * *

><p>The area was cleared of geth and the team continued on toward the dig site. Along the path two armatures stood in their path. The Mako started to open fire against the two geth walker as two small purple vehicles weaved in and out between the two armatures. Sork saw the two as he snarled, "Ghosts."<p>

Just like before someone was ready to leave the Mako but Six was the one who was waiting next to the hatch. "Commander. Focus your attention on the geth. I'll deal with the Ghosts." The Spartan waited for the Ghosts to come closer before she jumped out of the moving tank.

"Is she going to be alright?"

"Do not fear for her, young one. The devils have killed many of my kind. She will not let two Grunts kill her." Cortez was rather surprised to hear such admiration from the Elite warrior and he too knew he was right about Tali not needing to worry about her.

Six tumbled to a stop before quickly picking herself back up as she grabbed her pistol. The two Ghosts moved to kill her as the Mako continued to deal with the armatures. One of the Ghosts activated its speed boost in an attempt to run her over. Six remained calm as she let the Ghost continue to charge closer to her. At the last second she slammed her right fist into the ground as the Armor Lock overcharged her shields. The Grunt pulled the Ghost to the right, barely evading her at the last second as one of the wings hovered a few centimeters over her back. With much of the Ghost behind her, Six discharged the Armor Lock as the EMP blast temporarily disabled the Ghost. Desperately, the Grunt tried to jumpstart the vehicle only for death to appear in the form of a close up headshot with a magnum.

Six immediately threw the corpse out of the seat as the electronics came back to life. The second Ghost tried to keep his distance as he opened fire with its medium plasma cannons. Six turned her head to check on the Mako just as it jumped over a siege pulse and destroyed another armature with its cannon. Six turned her attention back to

the other Ghost returning fire. She was actually positioning herself in an attempt to lure the Grunt into a trap. Her Ghost was taking a beating while she pretended to miss most of her shots. Six quickly jumped out of the damaged vehicle just as the set of volleys ruptured the fuel cells causing an explosion that sent parts of the vehicle around Six. She continued her ploy in the hopes that the Grunt would try to ram her into the lava pits behind her. The Grunt activated the boosters and was now traveling at full speed to try and kill her. Six had Dot time her escape perfectly, giving her body a stimuli to react to rather than a vocal command. Six dove out of the way as the tip of her boots scrapped the port wing of the passing Ghost. In horror, all the Grunt could do was pray for a quick death as the vehicle rammed nose first into the lava and slowly began to sink. Six was at least merciful to the pathetic creature, placing a bullet into his skull before the lava reached the Ghost's fuel tank or the Grunt's methane tanks.

* * *

><p>With Six occupying the two Ghosts, Shepard was able destroy the four armature units as she prepared the Mako to eliminate the group of geth guarding the tunnel. The infantry troopers were easily taken care of with the Mako's cannon and machine gun while evading the Colossus' attacks. "Enough of this bouncing! I will end this."<p>

Sork jumped out of the Mako again and quickly hustled to the Colossus while they kept the machine's attention. Shepard was starting to get rather annoyed by this repeated act. "Are the two of them going to continue doing this?"

Cortez calmly answered, "I don't know about the Elite. But those Ghosts would have been a bigger problem if we didn't deal with them quickly."

Sork used the pipes to his advantage as the Colossus continued its effort to destroy the Mako. Without regret or remorse, Sork activated his energy sword and jumped out from behind the pipes. The Colossus didn't seem to view Sork as a threat, its first mistake. Sork jumped up and sliced one of the Colossus' front legs at the knee joint. The energy sword cut clear through the geth's armor as Sork positioned himself behind the machine. The Colossus tried to turn around to attack Sork but the missing limb was proving to be rather cumbersome, forcing a drastic weight distribution problem. Sork continued to torment the geth as he sliced off the adjacent back leg, collapsing the Colossus. Now the Elite climbed onto the back of the Colossus, raising his energy sword and jamming it into the head of the geth until the light died out. The Mako rolled up next to the pile of scrap as Six opened the hatch for Sork.

* * *

><p>Having finished gaining a proper understanding of the alien language, Lamenting Light started to commune with the alien. "Greetings. I am 2655 Lamenting Light. I am the monitor of this facility. Why have you intruded onto the premises?"<p>

"I'm sorry. I wasn't expecting to find anything beyond this dust building. This is an ancient Prothean site. One of a few in such great conditions. I was trying to learn more about them before I was

attacked by those things."

Lamenting Light turned to the others beyond the barrier curtain, "Ah yes. Specimen 231. Sangheili. I myself am rather surprised to see them here as well. We had found no evidence to suggest that the conditions for their evolutionary path had occurred here." The plasma energy continued to hit the barrier, "And those two rather large creatures using the plasma weaponry are something I have no data on."

"But can you do anything to help free me?" The blue female asked politely.

"I am afraid I cannot." Lamenting Light floated away from the barrier as he examined the controls, "Even though I am the monitor of this facility, I have little control over the devices created by the Protoheans. My creators limited my access to what little technology they had left behind, hidden deep within the Protohean structure. Even if I were capable of interfacing with the Protohean technology, I would not be capable of helping you."

The alien tried to turn her head toward Light as he returned to the center of the ruins. "Wait. Why wouldn't you be able to help me?"

"My programming strictly dictates that I am only to follow the commands given to me by my creators, or more specifically, those whose geas match certain criteria. The very likelihood of either appearing before us is astronomically improbable. Though I would have said the same thing about the Sangheili before today."

The alien seemed rather confused by Lamenting Light, but something else had caught her attention. Something seemed to be bothering the Sangheili in command. He shouted something to the two lumbering giants as they stopped firing on the barrier and moved to return to the surface.

* * *

><p>The Mako easily blew through the geth defending the tunnels but now the team had to hoof it as a rockslide made it impossible for the Mako to proceed any further. The team cut through the outer patrol, encountering more than just geth. Several Grunts and a hand full of Jackals proved to bolster the geth defenses. They found the entrance to the underground mine, a rather open area with nothing that seemed to be protecting it.<p>

A small protrusion on the underside of the bridge above was actually an inactive geth. The machine unfolded as it jumped down and jumped to the wall. Overheard a geth dropship flew by to deploy more geth and an armature. The team quickly took cover behind the few crates in the area before the armature's weapons had time to fire.

Cortez grabbed a grenade from his pack, tossing it over the crate they were using as cover. The grenade bounced off the bottom of the bridge as it rolled in-between the two geth snipers before exploding the two into pieces.

The two jumpy geth were harder to hit but Alenko was able to knock one with his biotics in mid-flight giving the team an opportunity to

kill it before it could recover. The squad took to cover as the siege pulse was fired at Shepard, Alenko and Six. The other hopper stopped against the wall as a laser sight started to target Tali. Sork moved her aside as he opened fire on the machine with his plasma rifle. The shock trooper started to fire on Sork as his shield buckled. Tali quickly hacked its IFF system causing the shock trooper to turn on the armature and rushed to it as it attacked. The armature however was quickly able to destroy the lone geth with a siege pulse but diverting its attention also left it vulnerable to the others. Its shields were quickly depleted but the armature turned its fire back on the two groups, first focusing on Shepard to its right before firing off a siege pulse to Cortez to the left.

The squad continued to whittle away at the tank until the entrance to the mine opened. "Cortez. Hunters."

"Shitâ€|Commander, I think now's the best time to fall back. Those hunters are a bigger threat and they'll move in to crush us."

"Not true." Sork used the last of the battery from the plasma rifle to finish the weakened armature. "Now they are our only obstacle between us and the female you seek."

"So how do we kill these things?"

Cortez looked out to see how far the hunters were before the plasma hit their cover. "Normally we'd call in support from heavy artillery; tanks, missiles, rockets, anti-armor. With what we have now, we don't have the firepower to kill them both."

"Fear not, imp. It seems your devil already has a plan. As do I. If weâ€|workâ€|togetherâ€|we should be able to kill the bond brothers."

Six and Sork moved around the two hunters while the others distracted the hunter pair. "Get down!"

Sork could see the hunters now and had to wait for Six before he could strike. Six was now behind the two hunters and crept closer to the closest hunter before jumping onto its back. Six was now holding for dear life as the hunter tried its best to shake her off. The other hunter moved to assist his brother in removing the Spartan. With the hunter's back turned Sork rushed out and jumped onto the other hunter's back with his energy sword active. Sork jabbed the blade into the neck of the hunter as he pulled out a plasma grenade he picked up from a Grunt. "May the flames of this Holy Flare send you and your brother closer to the Great Journey." Sork pulled the blade out as he rammed the plasma grenade into the hunter's neck and activated it.

Just as Sork jumped onto the other hunter, Six had pulled out Emile's kukri, remembering how her squadmate dealt with a hunter at the ship-breaking yard of Aszod. In a similar manner as Emile, Six started to gash into the hunter's wormy neck with the kukri working her way to severing the head. Sork pushed off the hunter and pushed it toward the other one Six was on. Six quickly jumped off her hunter before she could finish but was confident that the plasma grenade should finish the job. The explosion took out the upper half of the first hunter as the plasma burns made fine work of the second hunter and the worms that composed it. The remains of the two hunters

collapsed onto the floor, leaving the area clear for the team to proceed into the ruins below.

* * *

><p>AN: **I originally planned to have a Wriath along with the four armatures and Ghosts, but I thought that'd be too much. As some could tell, I skipped a few fights to speed things along, that and I needed to build up the monitor. Well, I'm probably going to be on hiatus for a bit as I play through ME3, god my grades are going to crash and burn. Oh, and for those who want to know how long Lament has been 'sleeping', Therum has an orbital period of roughly 6.4 Earth years, you do the math.

17. Chapter 17

**A/N: **Unfortunatly work has prevented me from doing an all day gaming session of ME3. But it did give me the chance to finish up this chapter for you all to read.

* * *

><p>Lamenting Light's sensors seemed to have detected something on the surface, above the ruins. "As much data as I have learned from you, Dr. T'Soni, I must excuse myself for a time. I have precedent matters to attend to below that require my attention now. I will return as quickly as possible to continue out exchange." Without even waiting for T'Soni to respond or acknowledge him, Light traversed back to his small data archive as he checked on their status. "Almost done. It seems the data continued to record even after I went into standby mode. Much of this is rather useless information anyways."<p>

* * *

><p>Inside the ruins the team encountered some geth resistance but was quickly put down. The Prothean structure looked nothing like the alien structure Dr. Halsey was in beneath SWORD base, quickly killing the notion that the two ancient races were the same. "Warning. Sensors indicate that there are active magma flows beyond these walls. Any major tectonic movements, natural or otherwise, could potentially cause these magma flows to enter this chamber." Six didn't like the sound of that scenario, but it was good to know of potential weapons to use, or dangers she had to plan for.<p>

* * *

><p>"Shouldn't we be killing them now, instead of waiting like cowards?"<p>

Quen smirked at the sight of Sork. "No. Let the humans do the work for us. Then we corner them, kill them and take the female."

"Kill two varren with one shot. I like it."

"We cannot let it seem like we want them to however. Send a few geth to entertain them while we get into position." Quen then signaled his men to release the few Yanme'e workers they had with them.

* * *

><p>The team moved on down the elevator to the lower level. When the elevator stopped the buzzing noise continued. "Buggers." Cortez, Six and Sork immediately moved to cover, "Commander, get to cover before they arrive."<p>

The buzzing only got louder until a group of eight insectoids flew up from below their current level. Most of the buggers had copper colored exoskeletons but one of them was red with prong-like extensions on its head. Following the bugs were a group of geth assault drones, of which Six counted four. Sork pulled out his energy sword, "Our first concern should be the drones. The geth will probably maintain their positions as they provide support fire."

As Sork assessed, the drones moved closer to them as a volley of shots came from both the geth and the drones. Six quickly killed one of the drones with a headshot as the bug exploded into pieces. One of the bugs tried to fly high and grab Tali, but Sork grabbed it instead by the head before throwing it down to the ground and stomping the bug under his hoof. Cortez attempted to gun down the red bugger, "Watch out, red's shielded and has a plasma rifle."

While the others continued to kill the other drones, Sork rushed out with his energy sword. He jumped at the drone as his energy sword penetrated the drone's exoskeleton as the two landed back down onto the walkway. 'Tasuvai immediately grabbed the plasma rifle out of the dead drone's hand to attack the geth. With all of the drones gone, the team was able to quickly deal with the remaining assault drones.

The team now journeyed on the next elevator down to the bottom of the tower. Reaching the lower reaches the elevator experienced a malfunction that caused the elevator to stop two floors before the bottom. Shepard was the first to venture down as Tali, Cortez and Kaidan followed while Six kept her scope out for any hostiles below as did Sork.

Their footsteps seemed to have been heard by someone as a woman's voice shouted out, "Uhâ€|hello? Could somebody help me? Please?" As Shepard, Alenko, Tali and Cortez moved closer, they found an asari trapped in a bubble as she called out to them, "Can you hear me out there? I'm trapped. I need help!"

"Liara T'Soni, I presume."

"Thank the Goddess! I did not think anyone would come looking for me. Listen. This thing I am in is a Prothean security device. I cannot move, so I need you to get me out of it. All right?"

Cortez didn't like the situation, "How did you end up in there exactly?"

"I was exploring the ruins when a strange alien grabbed be as he appeared out of nowhere. I thought I was going to die until strange machines came out of the ruins and started to attack. Then geth started to show up. Can you believe that? Geth! Beyond the Veil!" Liara quickly returned to the rest of her tale, "I activated the tower's defenses. I knew the barrier curtains would keep them out. When I turned it on, I must have hit something I wasn't supposed to.

I was trapped in here. You must get me out. Please."

Just as Shepard was about to ask her about her connection to her mother and Saren, Sork jumped down, "Humanâ€|"

"Look out! One of those aliens is right behind you!"

The squad turned to find only Sork. Tali tried to explain, "Sorry, this one is with us. Or at least he's here to protect me."

Sork examined the trapped doctor, "So this is the female you and Saren seek? I don't see why she is so special." Sork quickly turned back to the reason he dropped down, "We have spotted a small group of geth. They are maintaining their positions beyond that cumbersome machine."

Shepard turned back to Liara as he tried to calm her, "We'll find some way to help you."

"There is a control in here that should deactivate this thing. You'll have to find some way past the barrier curtain. That's the tricky part. The defenses cannot be shut off from the outside. I don't know how you'll get in here. Be careful. There is a krogan with the geth. They have been trying different ways to get past the barrier. Earlier they even had two rather large creatures trying to blast through the barrier with strange green weaponry."

With the team ready for combat, Shepard signaled to Six she was free to engage. Six started to fire on the sniper before it could become a problem for the others. Five rounds, three to break the shield and two through the eye to make sure it was down. "Sniper has been eliminated."

The others were using the massive machine below as cover as the geth opened fire on both groups. Tali hacked into the rocket trooper as it launched a rocket pointblank at the shock trooper next to it. Both units were damaged but the shock troopers eliminated the rocket trooper before it could attack again. Six finished off the damaged shock trooper with a shot through the eye as Cortez and Shepard finished the last geth.

Six rejoined Shepard to watch as Tali interfaced with the controls to the massive drilling laser. The laser activated, boring down into the ground. The laser deactivated to reveal a damaged section of the tower where the shield had not activated, possibly do to the debris that once obscured the section. Either case the team moved onto the elevator to free T'Soni.

As they approached her, Liara could hear footsteps behind her. She turned her head just enough to see them, "Howâ€|how did you get in here? I didn't think there was any way past the barrier!"

"We have to get you out of here before more geth arrive."

"Yes, you're right, I've seen enough of them to last a lifetime. That button should shut down my containment field."

Cortez stopped her, "Wait, Commander. Her mother works for Saren. Can we really trust her?"

Liara quickly stated among the arguments, "I am not my mother! I don't evenâ€”I don't know why Benezia joined Saren. I don't want anything to do with that turian bastard!"

Shepard argued against Cortez, "If she was with Saren, the geth wouldn't be trying to kill her."

To which Sork agreed, "If they were allies, Elite warriors would not have been sent to kill or capture her. That is, unless she has done something to betray them. Though given her reaction to me, she has not seen a member of the Covenant before today."

Shepard interacted with the controls next to Liara as the trapped deactivated and she dropped to the metal floor. With the elevator damaged they didn't have too many options back up. Alenko asked the doctor, "Any idea how we get out of this place?"

"There is an elevator back in the center of the tower. At least, I think it's an elevator. It should take us out of here. Come on!"

As the team gathered onto the platform, a green glowing metal orb emerged from the lower levels as it carried a group of glowing crystals in an energy field. "Oh, Dr. T'Soni. I see you've found others to aid in your release. This is most fortunate. We can continue our previous conversation before I had to leave so abruptly."

Liara started to grab her forehead after hearing the orb once again, "Goddessâ€”|"

"Holy one?" Sork quickly knelt down to his knees upon seeing the orb as he uttered, "Please forgive my sins great Oracle, for bringing those unworthy upon these hallowed lands."

However, the orb seemed rather confused, "Holy one? Oracle? Hallowed lands? I'm afraid I do not understand why you would say such things. They are no more hallowed then the magma that has hardened around us. But where are my manners? I am 2655 Lamenting Light. I am the monitor of this facility."

Before things could get back to topic, a tremor was felt by the team. "What the hell was that?"

Liara speculated on the tremor's origin, "These ruins aren't stable. That mining laser must have triggered a seismic event. We have to hurry. The whole place is caving in!"

Shepard quickly contacted the Normandy, "Joker! Get the Normandy airborne and lock in on my signal. On the double, mister!"

"Aye, aye, Commander. Secure and aweigh. ETA eight minutes."

"Not much margin for error."

Tali quickly added to Kaidan's comment, "He needs to move faster."

Reaching the top level of the tower, the energy field died for a moment as the krogan battlemaster, three geth and three Elites walked through, two Spec Ops and one covered in elaborate gold armor. Six

was readying her rifle when Shepard motioned her to stand down, for now. The krogan took charge as he shouted, "Surrender. Or don't. That would be more fun."

Shepard tried to make the krogan see the error in his logic of tactic, "In case you didn't notice, this place is falling apart."

"Exhilarating, isn't it? Thanks for getting rid of those energy fields for us. Hand the doctor over."

The gold armored Elite then spoke to Sork, "So the heretic turns to more heretics for help?"

"I am no heretic, Quen. It is Pity who you should be questioning! Look to your flank my brothers, you fight alongside machines! Do the ancient texts not warn of their treachery? Why does Pity force us to fight with them? They will be the Covenant's undoing."

"Enough of your lies, heretic! I will not let you twist the Prophet's words. Orâ€¦" The Elite noticed Lamenting Light as it tried to conceal himself behind one of the pillars, "An Oracle. Look at this, my brothers. They dare to defile an Oracle of the Great Journey! And for that they must all die."

"Now you're talking my language," the krogan battlemaster then fired off his shotgun as the three Elites rushed to engage the group.

T'Soni moved out of the way as Tali and Kaidan took care of the geth, Shepard and Cortez fought off the krogan, as Six engaged one of the Elites and Sork dueled against Quen and his minion. Tali hacked the sniper as Kaidan unleashed his strongest biotic warp against a shock trooper. She then gunned down the rocket trooper as the sniper took the shields off the second shock trooper.

The Elite tried to grab Six's helmet, but her reflexes seemed almost inhuman as she continued to shot at the giant reptilian only to hit his shield. The Elite then opened fire with his plasma rifle against the Spartan. Six rolled forward as she released her grip on her rifle as she grabbed for her combat knife and pistol. Six was now beneath the Elite as she stood back up, jamming her blade into his chest as she placed her pistol on the underside of his helmet and fired a single round. The round made a clean hole through the top of the helmet as purple blood started to drip down from the mouth and chest.

Shepard and Cortez were having a bit more difficulty with the krogan as the battlemaster tried to ram Cortez against his crest and a pillar. The plate left an impression on the metal beam but it didn't seem to affect the krogan in the slightest. Shepard drew his attention away from Cortez with controlled bursts from her assault rifle. Cortez returned the favor as he fired his SMG into the krogan's back. This seemed to only anger the krogan further as he fired off a powerful Carnage blast toward Cortez. He was able to dodge the incoming explosive, rolling toward the center of the elevator.

Sork only had a plasma rifle at fifty percent energy and a nearly depleted energy sword left, drawing out only the energy sword to

fight against his two opponents. His blade clashed against Quen's only to push him back as his soldier tried to strike him with one of his gauntlet's energy daggers. Sork quickly moved to the offensive as he tried to strike the nuisance down but Quen intercepted the strike as the minion tried to use both energy daggers to finish Sork. The former Light of Sanghelios knew all Elite combat maneuvers, and this was one of the basic two-man kill tactics. Sork pulled out the plasma rifle as he pointed it at the Spec Op, though he was disadvantaged with his missing eye, forcing to rely on his hearing to keep Quen at bay.

Seeing the sniper knock out the other geth's shields, Six fired a series of shots from her already drawn pistol into the back of the geth. As the sniper moved out of position from behind the crate Six ran passed as she threw the blood covered combat knife into the neck of the geth before Kaidan or Tali could fire on it. Without stopping, Six continued to rush toward the krogan as she grabbed the kukri from her shoulder. The krogan was about to charge at Shepard this time but Six managed to reach him before he did so. The krogan turned around to try and use his shotgun against her but Six anticipated that as she skid the last few feet on her knees, leaning forward to avoid the spread of pellets. In a single motion, Six's arm swung out and jabbed the kukri into the krogan's eye using the stuck blade to pull herself up as her pistol was placed over the krogan's other eye. Six then pulled the trigger five times into the krogan's eye while pulling the kukri out of the other eye.

Six started to gather her weapons she had left behind while Sork continued his duel. The others were about to attack until Sork shouted at them, "Do not interfere, humans! They are mine to send to the gods! They will atone for their sins soon." The Spec Op thought he had an opening when Sork shouted as he moved in low with the energy daggers ready to pierce both of Sork's hearts. Sork was actually hoping for this as he pulled the Spec Op by the arms and used him as a shield just as Quen's blade struck. The blade penetrated through the Spec Op's body through Sork was not behind him.

Quen pulled his blade out of his fallen comrade as he let out a loud war cry. Sork returned the call as the two were now deadlock, energy sword against energy sword. "I will rip your head from your carved body. Then I will take the devil and imp's heads as trophies for the Covenant and kill the others for fun. The Oracle will guide us to the Great Journey and you will be forgotten."

"That is if you can survive thisâ€¦" Sork pulled away, causing Quen's blade to strike the ground. Sork cut off the Spec Op's arm and activating the energy dagger as it was rammed into Quen's chest as he whispered a lesson Quen did not seem to adhere to, "Always kill your opponent swiftly and without mercy." Sork finished Quen by ramming his energy sword through his face and pulling it down toward his chest. The blade was depleted just as it was cutting through one of Quen's hearts. Sork dropped the depleted handle as he let out another roar, both of victory and sorrow. He picked up Quen's deactivated energy sword and a second plasma rifle.

The team recovered and moved to the barrier curtain. It was still active but it shut down once more. The tremors were getting worse now as the rocks from the ceiling started to fall. The team ran into a full run as they tried to leave the area. Sork could have easily out

run the others, only keeping his pace with Tali. Cortez stumbled for a bit against the collapsing walkway, but Six was able to grab hold of him and helped him back onto the more stable path. Sork saw a massive rock that would have taken out their only means of escape. He ran as quickly as he could to catch the boulder with his bare hands. As Tali ran past him, Sork used his impressive strength to toss the boulder out of the others way as he caught up to her. The team ran out of the tunnel as plumes of smoke erupted behind them.

* * *

><p>AN: **I'm soooo sad! I read through the ME tweets yesterday and...and...Emily Wong, one of the galaxy's best reports, has died! She died giving the galaxy as much information about the Reapers as she could before ramming her skyvan into an Oculus. I will play through ME3 fighting to avenge her and everyone else who's death has been caused by those monstrosities.

18. Chapter 18

A/N: **Sorry for the delay. I was preoccupied with ME3 and multiplayer(mostly multiplayer). I really hope Bioware can explain a thing or two about their ending(which I think doesn't need Normandy ***).

* * *

><p>Back on the Normandy, the crew gathered in the conference room as Joker reminded them of the ship's thermal limits, "Too close, Commander. Ten more seconds and we would've been swimming in molten sulfur. The Normandy isn't equipped to land in exploding volcanoes. They tend to fry our sensors and melt our hull. Just for future reference."<p>

"We almost died out there and your pilot is making jokes?"

Shepard thought she wouldn't have to explain such a thing to the doctor. "It's a coping mechanism. You'll get used to it."

"I see. It must be a human thing. I don't have a lot of experience dealing with your species, Commander. But I am grateful to you. You saved my life back there. And not just from the volcano. Those geth would have killed me. Or dragged me off to Saren."

O'Brien whispered to Six and Cortez, "So what's with the floating eyeball and the Elite? Guy's been worshiping the ground that thing's been flying over."

"We don't know. The thing is, unique."

The drone quickly sputtered about as it started to scan the new aliens in the room. "Most fascinating. Secondary organs and a neuroconductive fluid throughout the body. A very healthy specimen." The drone then floated to Garrus as he scanned him, "Unexpected. This one's genetic makeup is of a dextro-amino acid based complex with a metallic exoskeleton."

"Ehâ€|Shepard. Mind explaining what this thing is that's just scanned me."

"How very improper of myself. Excuse me. I am 2655 Lamenting Light. I was the monitor of the facility that was destroyed by the magma flows. I was simply scanning your physiology and comparing it to all know and cataloged races in my original database. You both are very unique specimens."

Shepard turned to T'Soni, "Do you know anything about the extra baggage?"

"Unfortunately I do not know. At first when it appeared, I thought it might have been a Prothean VI unit, but the design is nothing like anything I have ever studied before."

"Do not insult the great one with such indignity." Sork lowered his head in reverence to the strange orb, "It is an Oracle of the gods. Those who will guide the worthy on the true path of the Great Journey and lead us to salvation."

Light, even for a machine, seemed confused, "As I iterated before, Sangheili, I do not understand your use of terminology. Why would such meddlers hold my creators in such high regard? They had left specific instructions as to who were their true successorsâ€|"
Lamenting Light then hovered over to Six and the others who were gathered next to Alenko, "Of all within this room, my sensors have deduced that you three are Reclaimers."

Sork was infuriated by this statement from Lamenting Light, "No holy one! They are heretics! They would desecrate or destroy sacred relics and holy objects of the gods. They are not worthy of their gifts!"

"Despite whatever has transpired these past few millennia, my creators left the imprint that they are Reclaimers. The inheritors of their legacyâ€|"

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but that thing is starting to sound more like an AI than a VI."

Light turned toward Tali to properly reply, "Yes. I am a class 1 artificial intelligence unit charged with the care taking andâ€|"
Light soon noticed the others starting to give it a surly glare, though Wrex's face always looks surly. "Excuse me, did I do or say something to offend?"

Garrus mockingly noted, "Beyond the fact that you're an artificial intelligence, no not really."

Sork pulled out his blade as he pointed it to Garrus, "And if anyone wishes harm to the Oracle, they will have to go through me!"

O'Brien then pointed out the Elite's inconsistency, "Isn't that a contradiction of your stance on synthetic, big guy? You'd cut down a geth without question, but if any of us even thinks about pointing a gun toward that thing you'd kill us all." The Elite did not respond to him as his glare seemed capable of piercing through even Six's armor, "Alrightâ€|"

"But why do you view us as 'Reclaimers'?"

"Because of the geas." No one was sure as to what Lamenting Light was referring to as it floated closer to Six, "I detect the presence of the Forerunner geas imbedded within your genetic structures, something absent within the other three humans. Though I can only theorize as to how it could happenâ€¦"

Six had a sudden thought of something as she pulled O'Brien's pack off and started to rummage through his gear. She pulled out a crystal. "What about this?"

Lamenting pulled the crystal out of her hand as he examined it. "How interesting. This is a Forerunner crystal. The data is now comprehensible." Lamenting Light displayed a galaxy within the room. "This crystal augments slipspace travel from our universe to this one. Unfortunately it seems to no longer be capable of transmitting us even if we were capable of establishing a slipspace portal."

Cortez could see the tension growing in the others. He quickly turned the focus back on their other addition, "So doctor, what secret is it that Saren thinks is worth killing you for? Do you know something about a Conduit?"

Liara gladly answered Cortez's question as far as she knew; "Only that it was somehow connected to the Prothean extinction. That is my real area of expertise. I have spent the past fifty years trying to figure out what happened to them."

It seemed the crew's attention had diverted from Light for the most part, as Shepard questioned the doctor, "How old are you, exactly?"

"I hate to admit it, but I am only a hundred and six."

Ashley burst out with a slap to Six's back, "Damn! I hope I look that good when I'm her age."

"A century may seem like a long time to a short-lived species like yours. But among the asari, I am barely considered more than a child. That is why my research has not received the attention it deserves. Because of my youth, other asari scholars tend to dismiss my theories on what happened to the Protheans."

Shepard was hoping the doctor had evidence against Six's claim, "Did your research turn up anything interesting?"

"What is interesting is what I did not turn up. There is remarkably little archeological evidence of the Protheans. And even less that might explain why they disappeared. It is almost as if someone did not want the mystery solved. It's like someone came along after the Protheans were gone and cleansed the galaxy of clues. But here is the incredible part. According to my findings, the Protheans were not the first galactic civilization to mysteriously vanish. This cycle began long before them."

Cortez interrupted Liara, "Where'd you come up with this theory? I thought there wasn't any evidence."

"I have been working on this for fifty years. I have tracked down every scrap and shred of evidence. Eventually, subtle patterns

started to emerge. Patterns that hint at the truth. It is difficult to explain to someone else. I cannot point to one specific thing to prove my case. It is more a feeling derived from a half century of dedicated research. But I know I'm right. And eventually, I will be able to prove it. There were other civilizations before the Protheans. This cycle has repeated itself many times over."

Shepard didn't like the sound of that, "What cycle? What are you talking about?"

"The galaxy is built on a cycle of extinction. Each time a great civilization rises up, it is suddenly and violently cast down. Only ruins survive. The Protheans rose up from a single world until their empire spanned the entire galaxy. Yet even they climbed to the top on the remains of those who came before. Their greatest achievements—the mass relays and the Citadel—are based on the technology of those who came before them. And then, like all the other forgotten civilizations throughout galactic history, the Protheans disappeared. I have dedicated my life to figuring out why."

Six bluntly told her the answer, "They were wiped out by a race of sentient machines. The Reapers."

"The Reapers? But I have never heard of them. How do you know this? What evidence do you have?" The doctor was rather hesitant in accepting this sudden truth.

Shepard answered for her, "There was a damaged Prothean beacon on Eden Prime. It burned a vision into her brain. She's still trying to sort out what it all means."

"Visions? Yes—that makes sense. The beacons were designed to transmit information directly into the mind of the user. Finding one that still works is extremely rare. No wonder the geth attacked Eden Prime. The chance to acquire a working beacon—even a badly damaged one—is worth almost any risk." Liara wanted to examine Six closely, but contained her excitement, "But the beacons were only programmed to interact with Prothean physiology. Whatever information you received would have been confused, unclear. I am amazed you were able to make sense of it at all. A lesser mind would have been utterly destroyed by the process. You must be remarkably strong willed, miss."

O'Brien didn't see the point in all of this talking, "This isn't helping us find Saren. Or the Conduit."

Liara apologized, "Of course. You are right. I am sorry. My scientific curiosity got the better of me. Unfortunately, I do not have any information that could help you find the Conduit. Or Saren."

"I don't know why Saren wanted you out of the picture. But I think we'll be a lot better off if we bring you along."

Liara got out of her seat, "Thank you, Commander. Saren might come after me again. I cannot think of anywhere safer than here on your ship. And my knowledge of the Protheans might be useful later on."

Wrex only saw her combat potential, "And her biotics will come in handy when the fighting starts."

Shepard extended her hand to the doctor, "Good to have you on the team, Liara."

"Thank you, Commander. I am very grateful"whoa." Liara almost collapsed onto the floor at that moment, catching herself before she lost complete balance, "I am afraid I am feeling a bit light-headed."

Alenko could see the fatigue in her eyes, "When was the last time you ate? Or slept? Dr. Chakwas should take a look at you."

"It is probably just mental exhaustion, coupled with the shock of discovering the Protheans' true fate. I need some time to process all this. Still, it could not hurt to be examined by a medical professional. It will give me the chance to think things over. Are we finished here, Commander?"

"We can talk again after you've seen the doctor. The rest of you"dismissed!"

* * *

><p>As Shepard had her meeting with the Council, Tali and many other members of the Normandy crew had started to keep their eyes on Lamenting Light as it continued to float around Six. "Reclaimers. If you have a moment, I would like to make a few inquiries."<p>

Cortez turned to the others, hesitant to reply, "I don't see the harm"|"

"Splendid." Light flew between Cortez and O'Brien to speak with Six. "I've noticed you have rather extensive bio-augmentation. All beneficial, though your weaponry and armor systems are barely above a Class 2."

Cortez noticed Light still carrying the two other crystals. "So you said you were the curator of a database."

"Yes, this is all of the data I was able to save however. Most of what was lost was nothing of true import. Mostly geological readings during my stasis and the shift in the tectonic plates. I was fortunate enough to save the data from our exile here."

Sork appeared again from engineering, almost groveling to Lamenting Light. Six and the others grabbed their weapons as a precaution but Six soon noticed the Elite was unarmed. Though that didn't deter her from keeping the pistol trained on Sork's head. "Forgive my outbursts earlier, holy one. But I still cannot comprehend how these"humans can be destined for the Great Journey. Please tell me, are they meant to lead us on the path as you or is the Great Journey only meant for them?"

"I still have no information on this 'Great Journey' you speak of. Though I believe I might know what you mean by 'sacred rings', if they are in reference to the Halo Array."

"You do know the locations of the sacred rings!"

"No. The Didact ensured that such vital information in our war against the Parasite was only distributed on a need to know bases. Given how Mendicant Bias destroyed five of the original twelve halo rings proved his caution. Though why would you need them now? The Parasite had been subdued and life returned to the galaxy. Or at least, that was what our sensors detected. Has the situation changed? Have the Parasites returned?"

Six was rather concerned by Light, more so that Sork was interested in this object. "What's the Parasite? And Halo?"

* * *

><p>As Six continued to speak with the Normandy's newest unexpected passenger, Williams spoke with Garrus about it. "I can't believe we're letting that light bulb stay on the ship."<p>

"It's Shepard's call. But that thing seems more interested in speaking with Six than anyone else."

"I still don't think we should trust it. It's like a geth but without a body."

"I don't like it either, Williams, but I don't think we could do anything with that big guy unless we want him rampaging through the ship with that energy blade."

Ashley wasn't so worried about that. "I think Six and her friends would be more than a match for him. I'm more concerned about any surprises that floating ball might house."

Something rather unexpected happened, Sork started to yell out, "No! That cannot be! Your information is corrupted!"

"I speak only the truth. The purpose of the Halo Array is to terminate all with sufficient biomass that can sustain the Flood. It was the Forerunner's last hope of eliminating them. All other strategic options had been pursued and all had failed."

"What about Reclamation?"

"Reclamation?" Sork started to draw out the symbol on the floor using the cleaning supplies to help illustrate. Lamenting Light hovered over the drawing as he was unsure how to respond. "I'm sorry, but someone has either lied to you or mistranslated. That is not Reclamation. That is Relcaimer." Everyone could see the disheartened look on 'Tasuvai's face as the Elite left, returning to engineering. "Did I do something to offend?"

"I don't know but I think we've just gained ourselves a way to end the Covenant threat once and for all."

"Yeah Cortez, now all we have to do is give this guy to the Covenant and let it tell them they all screwed up on a translation."

Cortez smirked, "It isn't going to be that simple, but that's the gist of the plan. We just have to figure out how to spread the word and not die in the process."

* * *

><p>"It was all a lie!" The sound of the door opening caught the attention of the engineering team, as they watch Sork 'Tasuvai stagger in, completely ignoring everything. "All of our dead, our sacrifices, our victories, our prayers"they mean nothing" "<p>

Sork turned his head to the drive core as the energy pulsed. The warrior climbed onto the railing, ready to jump into the energy streams. The engineers were trying to stop him, but he easily knocked them back. But Tali stopped him, "Why are you doing this?"

"The Oracle"our Covenant has been nothing but a lie. I must atone for the lives I have slain."

"By throwing yours away?"

"My honor demands it!"

"And what about me?" Sork finally stopped fighting. "You said you'd protect me until your debt was paid. If you die now, you can't do that."

"And if you really want to make up for past mistakes, you need to be alive to do that," Engineer Adams added. "If you kill yourself you're cheating your way out of these responsibilities."

"You may be right, human." Sork remained still for a few moments before finally stepping back down. "Very well. I will continue this existence, if only to fulfill my debt to you and free my brethren from the lies told to them by the Prophets. After that, I will take my own life for my sins I have committed in the name of our gods."

"But why? If you live that long, why would you end it?"

"My life, my brothers, we have dedicated our lives to fulfilling the goals of the Covenant; locating holy relics of the gods in search of the sacred rings so we may activate them and begin the Great Journey to follow the Forerunners to salvation. For generations our fathers and forefathers have fought and died in the pursuit of these goals. But the Oracle has shattered three thousand years of teachings with a single sentence. Everything we thought we were fighting for."

"Well, maybe now is a chance to save them."

Sork looked up at the drive core, "Yes. Maybe this is why my life has been spared. To spread the truth to my brothers and open their eyes to the lies."

* * *

><p>With Sork gone, Six turned to Light to ask it another question, "Do you know anything about the Reapers?"<p>

Light scanned one of the crystals as it search for a reference to 'Reapers'. "I'm afraid I do not."

Cortez had a nother question, "I want to know how you and your

creators came here and what happened to them."

"Ah, you mean our exile."

"Exile?"

Light gleefully explained, "Before the Halo Array was activated, many Forerunner retreated to the Ark, a facility outside of the array's radius. After the array was activated and the parasite had starved, the Ark facility launched keyships to reseed the galaxy. With the Flood defeat, many Forerunners believed we no longer deserve to guide the galaxy as we once did. The Librarian had ensured humanity's claim as Reclaimers so a number of Forerunners felt they could leave it in their care. Some chose exile to the galaxy we had retreated to. Others felt that they might make a difference in our home galaxy, though they were a small branch from within a group that wished to start anew in a different universe."

"OK, so that explains how you got here. That doesn't explain why you were sleeping in those ruins."

Light solely used its own memories to recount the events. "The Forerunners crafted a special crystal that would help alter slipspace flight so it may lead us to this alternate universe. A second was crafted should the others decide they wished to join us. It appears they reconsidered the offer. For the next four-thousand years, the Forerunners claimed the world as their home and remained isolated from the galaxy. But soon, a spacefaring race arrived and demanded we join them. Fearing our technology might be too much for these beings or cause a technological unbalance, the Forerunners hid most of their technology, myself included, within the ship in an underground hangar. The ship that was later convered to my archives. The Forerunners then integrated into this new society and continued to feed me information about the galaxy. Roughly 50,000 years ago however, all contact was severed. I was in the dark. All sensors were remotely deactivated by the Forerunners and I was also remotely shut down for the next five-hundred years. After reactivation, I continued to monitor the changes on the surface and cataloging all of the data. Unfortunately most of that data was not transferred into the crystal storage units."

Six couldn't help but feel alone with such knowledge yet with nothing to verify it, "So, you don't know anything about what happened."

"Beyond the Empire that was turned to dust, I do not. I believe they deactivated me so that I might give this new galactic society a chance to survive, but against what, I do not know."

* * *

><p>AN: **Well that was interesting, wonder if they could convert Elites they encounterâ€|probably not. Well I'll try to continue on from here now that I got over that hurdle.

19. Chapter 19

**A/N: **Another long overdue update, yeah, well at least its coming, unlike some stories out on the site.

* * *

><p>The director continuously replayed the video of Sork's reaction to the information given by Lamenting Light. The Illusive Man was also viewing the video footage alongside him, "Can we use this to our advantage?"<p>

"I believe so. And Cortez's suggestion isn't as crazy as one might think." The director pulled out file footage of the Covenant's assault on Reach Dot still possessed. "If we can locate where they have set up base camp, we could use the Normandy to infiltrate it and destroy them from within."

"I've already dedicated enough resources to find Saren. If Therum is any indication to their alliance, then I believe that if we find his base, we find them."

"I concur. It's all just a matter of time now. I'm sending orders to Dot now. And when we find Saren, I'll forward the intel to them. In the meantime, I think our project on Luna has gone out of control and needs immediate termination."

* * *

><p>As the Normandy traveled to the Attican Beta cluster, Shepard was contacted by Alliance Command with a secondary mission; The Alliance has lost a data module they had been using to gather intel on geth movements in the cluster. Hoping it to be as simple as it seemed, Shepard only asked Ashley and Kaidan to join her. Yet Six, for some reason, insisted that she go to. She didn't have an exact answer as to why she just 'felt' like she need to. While they were gone, Shepard ordered Lamenting Light not be allowed access into any of the Normandy's systems, much to the monitor's dismay.<p>

The Normandy's sensors picked up a potential match for the surveillance drone on the planet Eletania in the Hercules system. The Mako touched down on the planet's surface following the crash site the Normandy found in the region. Find the area, Shepard moved to investigate the module as Six watched the area. Kaidan was familiar with Alliance surveillance devices and tried to find what they were looking for, "This is the surveillance drone. But where's the data module?"

Along with the crashed satellite there were a few indigenous monkey-like creatures. "Commander."

"Guess we're doing this the hard way."

"Alright team, load up." Coordinating with Normandy, they were able to find a number of colonies. Shepard surveyed two colonies and found a mineral deposit. Driving back Shepard wanted to investigate an anomaly not far from where they landed.

Driving through the mountain ranges they found a strange orb surrounded by a Prothean ruin. Shepard was able to activate the orb as it lifted off the ground and started to resonate with an object hidden in one of Six's pouches. She pulled out the orb she had received from Sha'ira and placed the tiny orb into the slot on the larger artifact. There as a blinding light that came from the orb as

Six fell to the ground. Her vitals were strong though she was unconscious.

During this lap of unconsciousness, Six experienced a vision of a Cro-Magnon hunter and his life with an implant of a Prothean data recorder in the back of his skull. Almost a minute passed before Six became active as she pulled herself up. Kaidan helped her up, "There was a flash of light and you just sort of toppled over."

"Are you okay, Six?"

Six grabbed the side of her helmet, still recovering from the unexpected vision. "I'm fine, ma'am. Let's continue with our objective."

Continuing on they found a colony next to an abandoned mine. Having scouted all other colonies, the team traveled into the tunnel finding more of the alien creatures. Venturing deeper into the abandoned mine, Six scouted the area ahead of Shepard. She didn't like the setup, something felt wrong. The squad entered an offshoot tunnel where they found it, "He dropped the data module!"

Kaidan picked up the module and examined it, "It's a miracle the data module is still intact. Joker should be able to transfer this info to Alliance Command."

On their return trip out, Six noticed that the alien creatures who were walked all around were missing now. She activated her helmet's night vision to light up the cavern. She spotted geth units moving in on them. Six moved away from the team and engaged the geth openly drawing them away from Shepard. The others joined her in the assault, Six moved on to the right flank as Kaidan took on the shock troopers to the left.

Six moved over to the right allowing Shepard to take up a position to help. Six took out one of the snipers just as Kaidan grabbed a shock trooper in a biotic Lift. Ashley killed the helpless geth and Shepard took out another shock trooper. Six spotted a destroyer slowly moving up behind some of the troopers. She grabbed a frag grenade to toss at the group. She pressed the button and rolled it to their feet. The geth didn't seem to pay any attention to the grenade as it stopped beneath the destroyer. The grenade took out the destroyer and the two troopers. Shepard swapped her assault rifle for her sniper while Six distracted the last sniper. Ready, Shepard targeted the geth's head and made a nice hole on the side of the light bulb. With that side cleared there was only a single shock trooper left for the team to deal with but Kaidan had already knocked it back with a biotic Throw as Ashley moved above it and riddled it with several holes. Six's motion sensor didn't detect any hostiles left. Nether the less they proceeded with caution until the Normandy picked them up.

* * *

><p>Returning to the ship, Six checked on Cortez and O'Brien. "What's he been doing?"<p>

O'Brien and Cortez put their helmets on to keep their conversation in private. "After his chat with the light bulb, nothing. He's been meditating or something. He's just sitting there with his eyes closed. I don't like it. I think we should have a little 'accident'

and be rid of him. Like a weapon misfire ending with a bullet in his head."

Dot, using Six's helmet channels, reminded O'Brien, "Lance Corporal, the director has requested that we do not harm Sork 'Tasuvai unless he proves unmanageable or is incapable of swaying the overall leadership of the Covenant presence here."

"He really wants us to go through with that plan?"

"Affirmative. Given the emotional distort seen by this high ranking Elite, the director believes it is possible to undo the Covenant at its very core. But we require the full cooperation of Sork 'Tasuvai and his knowledge of Covenant protocols to safely transmit the information provided by Lamenting Light."

"This is stupid!"

"O'Brien!"

"Don't try lying to yourself, Cortez. You know it's true too."

Before O'Brien could rant any further, Six pulled Dot out of her helmet and placed a hand on his shoulder, "O'Brien. The director is the highest ranking UNSC official we have. We will follow his orders."

O'Brien couldn't accept that, "The UNSC? There is no UNSC left. It's the Alliance, Cerberus and us. I know you two probably figured this out long before me, but sooner or later we've got a choice to make. Either we keep doing what we've been doing with Cerberus or we somehow join the Alliance and forget the Illusive Man."

"And it's not going to be that easy. We can't risk Dot falling into the Illusive Man's hands but she's also a liability if we try to plan anything against them. Give us some time, O'Brien, though I do want to put an end to the Covenant as a threat to humanity."

Six reinserted Dot, having learned a few methods of keeping secrets from the 'dumb' AI. After reestablishing herself, Dot alerted the team, "Priority one message from the director."

* * *

><p>Sork has confined himself to engineering to meditate upon this information provided by Lamenting Light. Tali however started to get worried as he has not moved for over a day. "Sork. Commander Shepard is landing on a human base soon. Something about a rouge VI taking over a closed system. He's asked for my assistance."<p>

Sork continued to remain unmoved with his head lowered, eyes closed and sitting on his legs. "I cannot. I am still confronting my own devils about this information. I would be of little assistance here. There is still too much animosity between my kind and the humans for me to walk onto one of their bases."

"Alrightâ€¦I'll contact you if we need any assistance." Tali was hesitant to leave him there, but what else could she do for him.

* * *

><p>O'Brien had some major concerns about returning to the Sol system, especially with the Elite still on the ship. Cortez was also concerned but he didn't vocalize it, nor did Six as she checked her weapons while waiting for the Mako to drop. Cortez volunteered to stay onboard to ensure Sork never learned where they were or the significant impact it may have should he learn. Commander Shepard had asked Kaidan along with Tali to join her. While the Mako departed, Cortez moved himself to engineering. Sork could feel this new presence watching over him. He remained in his meditative state questioning the human, "Imp, why do you watch over me like the other?"<p>

Cortez kept his distance, "I just have a bad feeling about something, that's all."

"And it encompasses me?"

"You could say that."

Sork let out a heavy sigh, "It is understandable. I have done nothing to justify any trust from your kind, imp. To once hold such pride for my actions after learning the truth is unacceptable. I will find a means to atone for the sins of my people and my ownâ€|"

* * *

><p>The Normandy flew closer to Luna's surface to deploy the Mako to the surface. The Mako's thrusters activated to soften the landing. "Most exhilarating. You humans have developed in such an unexpected technological path."<p>

The team turned to find Lamenting Light had unexpectedly joined them. "How the hell did that thing get in here?"

"That thing nearly gave me a heart attack."

"Forgive me, Reclaimer. I was forbidden to examine the ship's systems so I wished to investigate this vehicle more thoroughly. When the dextro-amino acid reptilian move away from the vehicle I thought I could have a moment to examine the technology within, but to experience it was quite another."

Six turned to the Commander, "What now, ma'am?"

"I'd rather not go through the hustle of being picked up then dropped again. Just as long as it stays out of our way we won't have any trouble."

"Why of course, human. My primary concern is the safety of the Reclaimers and my data archives. Even my functionality is superseded by these priorities." With much regret, Shepard accepted Lamenting Light's promise.

Using the Mako, Shepard ended the services of several external turrets in control of the rouge VI unit. At the main facility the base was divided into three facilities. Shepard insisted the team split up into smaller strike teams to overwork the VI to capacity. Six volunteered to oversee Lamenting Light while also taking out one

of the facilities alone. Shepard was reserve in letting Six do that but having seen her fighting first hand on Therum, Shepard was reluctantly willing to let her. O'Brien and Kaidan moved to dispatch one base as Tali and Shepard handled another, leaving Six to deal with the last base.

* * *

><p>Alone in the base Six was ready to complete her real mission: the deactivation of the rouge AI prototype and transferring it to the director for study, even fragments of it would suffice. Anticipating only automated defenses as readied her DMR for battle, walking over a few Alliance bodies from when the AI went rouge. Lamenting Light was being unusually quiet as it observed her actions. "Dot, give me a run down on Alliance combat drone protocols."<p>

"Certainly. Alliance combat drones have two variants: assault drone equipped with a basic mass accelerator machine gun and rocket drone. Normal Alliance combat protocols have these drones used in infantry support roles. I can't anticipate how this AI may use them to defend itself."

Six opened the door into the facilities main working area. Six could see three assault drones sitting and waiting, though she expected more beyond what she could see. She didn't want to face the entire brunt of the group, having seen these VI drones attack. Six then had an idea, "Lightâ€|"

"Yes Reclaimer."

"I want you to interface with those drones."

"Though my duties once entailed such interfacing, my current role is data archiving notâ€|"

"Just do it."

"As you wish, Reclaimer." Six didn't have any expectations for Lamenting Light at succeeding, though she did wish to test the monitor's combat capabilities, if any. In the center of the room the monitor attempted to communicate with one of the drones, "Greetings fellow automaton. I am 2655 Lamenting Light." As expected the drones started to attack Lamenting, what wasn't expected was the monitor's shield strength or the laser beam that fired from Light's eye. Six was stunned at the devastation Light caused but quickly joined the assault providing aid to Light.

* * *

><p>O'Brien and Alenko were preparing to assault their facility and as the two did Kaidan started asking questions, "So, how long have you been working with her? I mean Six."<p>

"Uhâ€|a few months now."

"Do you know anything that she likes?"

"A good sniper rifle, DMRs, single shot weapons, that combat knife she always carries; not the big one, that little oneâ€|"

"No, no. I meant like personal interests, hobbies, things she likes to do when she's outside that armor."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute," O'Brien stepped back from the door, "You want to get in there? Look I'll save you the trouble right now; you won't be able to find anything about her."

"Oh, sorry. I didn't know you and she wereâ€¦"

"What? Eh, no! No, uh, well, she and I have aâ€¦professional relationship." O'Brien took a moment to calm down, "Look, she's very reclusive. I've never seen her fully outside of that armor except after what happened on Eden Prime. She takes the helmet off every so often if she wants to draw less attention but that's rare too." O'Brien wasn't sure what to expect from Kaidan now, but he quickly changed the subject, "Come on we'd better hurry. If I know Six, she's nearly done clearing out her facility by now." O'Brien opened the first door and moved up to the main floor, filled with drones waiting for them.

* * *

><p>With Lamenting Light's assistance Six quickly cleared the area of all drone forces. "Commander. We've cleared all drone forces. Moving to the VI conduits now," Six opened the door to the first set of conduits. She pulled out remote charges and planted them onto the VI conduits.<p>

Lamenting Light patiently hovered Six as she had planted the charges. After completing the task Light couldn't help but ask her, "Reclaimer, I do not mean to sound impertinent but, your use of my defenses was entirely out of protocol."

Six grabbed one of the disabled drones, "See this? Machines are viewed as nothing more than tools and weapons. Whatever your Forerunner creators had used your kind for is completely different from how the rest of the galaxy views you." She tossed the scrap aside, "But, I'll try to remember that you're different next time."

"That is all I ask, Reclaimer."

* * *

><p>Tali's hacking skills coupled with the Commander's combat expertise allowed the duo to quickly cut a path through the drones. Shepard had started the fight by using her sniper rifle. She switched to her assault rifle as Tali turned a drone against the others and overloaded a few of their systems. With only a handful left Shepard grabbed her shotgun to finish the job. As Shepard moved around to flank the last three drones, her radio kicked in, "Commander. I've cleared all drone forces in this facility. Moving to the VI conduits now."<p>

Shepard tossed a grenade into the group and detonated it in mid-flight. Tali threw an Overload tech mine to finish them off. "That Six sure works fast."

"We're almost done too. Let hurry up and shut this VI down."

* * *

><p>O'Brien got himself cornered as he fired onto an assault drone. Kaidan threw a tech mine to disable the drone's weapons, giving O'Brien the chance to finish it off. O'Brien now had an opening to escape the pin. Kaidan and O'Brien shot down the other two drones before they realized he'd escaped. "Hey, thanks for saving me just there."<p>

"We're part of the same team, don't worry about it." The duo continued on to the VI conduits. As O'Brien started to plant the charges, "Commander, this is Alenko. We're planting charges on the conduits now."

"Good to hear, Kaidan. We just finished our set over here. Just another minute before this VI is shut down permanently."

"Wait," It was coming from Six, "The VI's activating rocket drones here. Be on alert for others."

* * *

><p>Six was using the narrow pathways to funnel the drones together. She tossed a grenade into the mass, destroying a few but damaging the others. Before the smoke even cleared Six moved out to shot down the damaged drones. "Six reporting. All hostiles terminated. Exiting the facility now."<p>

As Lamenting Light floated back to the entrance and Six shut the doors to the conduits to detonate her charges. The facility shook from the violent shockwave, though not enough for the other facilities to feel them or the aftershocks. Six reopened the doors as the smoke vented out the only path open to it. Her suit could deal with the heat exiting the area as she returned to the conduits. "O'Brien here, conduits are gone."

"Ours are finished as well. Everyone return to the Mako for extraction."

Six pulled Dot out of her suit so the AI could salvage what remained of the destroyed AI prototype, storing it until they returned to the director for analysis. As Dot mined the computer for data, a damaged monitor started to flicker with life as a sequence of zeros and ones started to run across the entire screen, repeating until Dot's symbol flashed over it to indicate to Six she had completed her task. After fitting the chip back into her helmet, Six questioned her AI, "Dot, what was that message the AI tried to send out?"

"It was a cry for help."

_Helpâ€| _A word Noble Six had given up on for herself when her family was killed before her eyes long ago. She could only imagine the experiments the director or the Illusive Man had in store for the unfortunate AI, but there was nothing she could do for it. Six returned to the others who were none the wiser about the data she had recovered on the AI from Luna.

* * *

><p>AN: **I always felt that Cerberus had a hand in the

incident on Luna even back in ME1, support only mounted after ME3 came out. Don't tell me you didn't go to a same system to do that mission and completely forget about Feros for a time being to do other missions. Don't worry, I haven't forgotten about Regret and the Covenant. With school, work and life I'll try to keep going, so expect delays.

20. Chapter 20

****A/N: **Better than how long it took last time.**

*** * ***

><p>Returning from the mission on Luna, Six noticed Shepard spending her time speaking with her crew, including the non-humans. She has tried to chat with her as well, though Six would stonewall her, however O'Brien on the other hand have been more open with speaking with the Commander. Six made sure he didn't talk about the director, the UNSC or the fact that they have been working with the Illusive Man and Cerberus the entire time.<p>

During one of these discussion while Six had walked off to check on something, Shepard tried to get more information from O'Brien, "Come on. You're telling me you and Cortez really don't know a thing about her past."

"We've only worked with her a few months longer than you. That mission on the moon is normally about as much interaction she'll ever do with anyone, during ops or otherwise."

"You're kidding?"

"Come on, it shouldn't be a surprise after having worked with her for a few days now. Actually, I was surprised she even offered to watch over the light bulb. She's usually the lone wolf type. She'll complete missions with or without us. She never hesitates when it comes to pulling the trigger and I don't see her have any trouble killing the Elite guest we have down there."

Shepard turned back to see if Sork had left engineering, "What makes you say that?"

O'Brien shrugged as he leaned against the wall, "Cause, she's a Spartan. They kill guys like him for breakfast. Having worked with her for so long I can say she wouldn't go down 'cause one Elite, it'd have to take her by surprise on a bad day or a small army head on of them to bring her down and even then she'd fight them off to her dying breath."

The elevator door opened as Six continued to listen to Lamenting annotating aloud, "â€|and on that point, it should be noted that the infrastructure on theâ€|" Light noticed Six staring at something, turning his attention toward that direction, "Did we interrupt something?"

"O'Brien was just telling me about one of his mission. Wasn't that right?"

"Uhâ€|yeah. So as I was saying, Checkman almost tripped over the

sleeping Grunt but Dutch was able to grab him just before he was helmet to breathing mask with the ugly bastard."

Six didn't seem to care one way or the other, walking past the two she returned to her weapons as she started to dismantle them for inspection and cleaning.

* * *

><p>Over the planet Virmire Saren was giving Pity and a small entourage another tour of Sovereign's interior. This time Saren was showing them Sovereign's drive core. Pity was rather intrigued by Sovereign's inner workings and how unique the technology was. "Now that we have covered every room within the ship, I must ask, why?"<p>

"What do you mean?"

Pity's chair hovered away from the others to an observation deck with a view of Virmire, "Taking us on such extravagant tours, urging us to explore Sovereign. We have not offered such gestures, nor has the Fleet Master even considered such a notion for you or the geth. Are you waiting for something to happen?"

Saren looked down to the planet as he watched the arrival of one of the Covenant ships, "Actually I was. I am trying to speak to your Covenant through you and those who come aboard. To show them the light they seek is not too distant from the light I am after. You see, Sovereign has shown me a vision, a vision where organics and machines are pushed to their ultimate potential. A fusion if you will: The strength of both, the weaknesses of neither. If you can convince the others of the vision I seek, I'm sure I can convince Sovereign to offer this gift upon you and your fellows."

Pity smiled at Saren's suggestion, as though it was his to begin with, "Yes that is a potential beneficial proposition, a choice between one godhood or another. The Yanme'e, and Kig-yar will follow my command without much difficulty. The Uggnoy are spineless. My only concerns would be with the Sangheili and the Mgalekgolo who will follow them. The Fleet Master and his inner circle in particular."

"As long as you can convince them that this is what their gods have sought before them, then I'm almost certain they will be more than willing to help."

"Were it so easyâ€¦!"

* * *

><p>"Fleet Master!" Rayta was looking over the hologram of the galaxy as Raja ran up to him, "Fleet Master, the Prophet and several others have been escorted aboard the Sovereign."<p>

"Again? That's the tenth time they've journeyed to the vessel," Walking toward the observation deck to view the ship from a distance. "What is Saren trying to achieve?"

"I do not know, but Pity was rather secretive about this trip for some reason. Even the honor guards were not told of this venture. And

that is how I learned of it."

Rayta continued to gaze upon the massive vessel, trying to drown out a strange buzzing in his ears with simulated combat scenarios in his mind. "We shall ignore it, just this once. But should Pity or Saren do such a thing again, I will personally lead a team in ensuring his safety." Rayta walked back to the hologram, "How is your sub-commander performing on his first mission without your guidance?"

"He is faring well. He and his team have successfully deployed onto the human world while Saren 'visited' without the humans detecting either. They will remain within the shadows as they search for the artifact Pity has indicated was on the planet as they assist the geth with their objective of destroying the 'Thorian'."

"So long as this artifact is recovered, that should be their primary objective. Once found they are to call for extraction, even if the geth have yet to destroy this Thorian. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Fleet Master."

* * *

><p>A week had passed since the mission on Luna, Commander Shepard has traveled to several uncharted worlds and derelict civilian ships. She's wiped out mercenaries and slavers camps, claimed several mineral deposits, located many turian, asari and salarian artifacts, helped Wrex reclaim his grandfather's lost armor and found Dr. Saleon with Garrus Vakarian. Sork also became more active, participating in a few of the operations that did not require a vacuum sealed suit. Lamenting Light has also proven its worth, providing a more accurate translation of Sangheili dialect and hijacking automated controls to use against enemies they had run across.<p>

Six had started to notice the crew developing the same awe inspired looks sent her way similar to the looks she once received from the marines of the UNSC. She has also noticed Dr. T'Soni was in awe as well, though it wasn't for her military prowess, more so for her interaction with the Prothean beacon and the orb on Eletania. She treated all of this awe exactly how she used to handle it, she completely ignored them however possible. The most interaction she would ever do with the crew was grab food from the mess hall or passing them when preparing for a mission with the Commander. Shepard has tried to have Six interact more with the crew, though Six would respond with she'd take it under consideration.

The Normandy was now on approach for the human colony on Feros. The area was devastated, Six was only reminded of Reach and how relentless the Covenant was in their attack of the planet.

Sork could also see the similarity in attack patterns, through the extent of the damage was localized to isolated sectors. The geth had a particular target in view, but humans are resilient and resourceful, Sork could only think of how impressive the defenses might be if they had a demon among them.

As Sork and Shepard were preparing to leave the Normandy, Six, Cortez and O'Brien had already suited up and the airlock was equalizing the pressure to the outside. Once outside the ship they were greeted by

one of the colonist, "We saw your ship. Fai Dan wants to speak with you immediately."

Cortez took charge, acting as the commanding officer, "As would we. Please take us to him so we can assess the situation."

The man nodded as he signaled to follow him. As he started to walk back he noticed something coming toward them. "Look out!" The colonist tried to run for cover only for a geth to hit him dead on with a rocket, killing him instantly.

"There goes the welcoming committee."

"Commander, this is Cortez. We've lost a colonist who was greeting us. The geth are in entrenched positions. They were waiting for us. Advise your team to hold until we clear the docking area."

"Copy that Cortez. Just try not dying on us."

O'Brien took his first kill with the sniper rifle, "Like we'd let ourselves be taken out by a couple of mechs."

"It is not the machines you should fear, human. Given the size of the colony, I wouldn't be surprised of Fleet Master Rayta to insert a small Spec Ops team to ensure the success of the geth mission, should they fail."

"No confidence in the geth, huh?"

"Not against your kind, imp. Your species is resourceful and resilient. It is for the very same reasons you continue to live today."

Six tossed a frag grenade, clearing out another geth as Cortez moved up. Six used herself as a decoy so O'Brien could take out the sniper. Cortez was able to sneak up onto a geth trooper and fired his entire clip into its abdomen. "All clear for the moment, Commander. We'll hold our position until you arrive."

* * *

><p>Commander Shepard, Tali'Zorah, Ashley and Sork found the body of the colonist as well as the geth. Cortez waved the Commander over as Six returned from scouting the stairs. "Geth had the stairway guarded with two of the hopper units we encountered on Therum. Both units have been eliminated."<p>

Just like O'Brien told Shepard earlier, Six acted on her own and cleared the path for them. The squad continued to the colony, carefully ensuring there path was clear of all geth. Reaching the entrance to the colony, they found it was being defended by a handful of colonist behind barriers, only one with combat armor. They could see they most had never fired a gun before the attack, their hands were shaking and one of them even fell backwards upon seeing Sork. In the middle of the colony there were the remaining modules from a Kowlook Class frigate of which the colonists were using for a shelter.

The colonist seemed rather reserved about speaking with the group, though it didn't feel like Sork was the only reason for it. Even the

salarian merchant advise they speak with this Fai Dan fellow first. The colony was devastated though it was livable unlike a full scale Covenant invasion. They found a man and a female security officer near the other entrance to the colony.

"Oh, Commander. I'm glad they finally sent somebody to help us."

The security officer however didn't see them as such, "You're a bit late, aren't you?"

"Arcelia!" Fai Dan then bowed towards the group, "Sorry, Commander. Everyone's on edge sinceâ€"

"Watch out!" Arcelia raised her rifle as she shouted, "We've got geth in the tower."

Fai Dan rushed to lock the module as he shouted to the others, "Protect the heart of the colony!"

Cortez grabbed a grenade as he tossed it over the stone block and into the stairway where the geth had to come through. Even though the geth were smart enough to avoid the blast, it was a cover to allow Sork the time needed to close the gap between himself and the machines to finish them with quick and powerful jabs from his gauntlet energy daggers. O'Brien covered the Elite's advance as he sniped the sniper.

Another sniper and shock trooper continued down the stairs ready to strike Sork down. Tali intervened and hacked the shock trooper's IFF, turning it against the sniper. While the two geth fought with one another, Williams and Six finished the two off.

Shepard moved up the stairs and found a colonist defending the chock point alone. He saw Shepard approaching, "I don't want to die. Please don't let me die." Before she could reach him a rocket from one of the geth exploded behind a wall near the colonist, killing him before they could do anything. Six grabbed a frag grenade and handed it to Shepard. She bounced the grenade against the wall to the feet of the geth troops. The blast took out one of the geth, damaging the shock trooper. Shepard rushed out to finish the shock trooper while Ashley and Six covered the Commander against the last trooper.

* * *

><p>With the commotion down to a whisper, Lamenting Light left the Normandy as it started to examine the geth and the dead human thoroughly. "How unusual. Synthetic life forms based upon a networked intelligence while using communication channels to enhance their own processes. The creators of this design should be proud of their creations, such a marvel at work. There are many benefits from using this archetype though requiring others to attain sentience is something I believe requires major improvements. Their platforms are rather impressive as well. Each unit perfectly designed for their designated rolls. I can only speculate about any further capabilities without examining a fully functional geth unit personally. It is a shame that these geth have yet to develop true plasma weaponry. I find it rather unusual, for an intelligence I suspect to be vastly superior to even my own, should the collective intelligence be as large and complex as I believe it to be, have yet to unlock the capability of forging energy weaponry. I mean, the design

specifications are not too different from the current armaments of which they presently employ." With his curiosity temporarily sated about the geth, Light moved to inspect the dead human. "Oh dearâ€¦" <p>

Lamenting Light quickly returned to the Normandy through the air lock as it attempted to access the ship's systems. The security onboard stepped in as they targeted the orb. "Stand down machine."

"I fear the Reclaimers, and your Commander, have walked into danger that they are unaware of. I merely wish to confirm this using the ship's sensor array to scan the humans nearby. A few scans will provide me with the data need to determine if my initial analysis is an error." Light floated about as its eye was in front of one of the men, "I have been ordered by the Reclaimers to limit my interactions with others outside of this ship. I assure you I will only use the sensors and it will only be for a few moments. If it comforts you, I will display my activities for you to monitor."

Given the reports by Six, there would be little they could do against the monitor, should it decide to fight back. Lamenting Light quickly started to work, displaying three genetic structures. "What are those?"

"Genomes from three different specimens. This structure belongs to a Reclaimer's genetics archived within the Ark I was able to analyze. This structure is of one of the humans on the vessel, namely the elderly navigator human. This last one is from the human killed just outside of the vessel." Light quickly scanned through all three structures in a matter of seconds.

Afterwards the three structures disappeared as two more genetic structures were displayed in their place. "Now what is it doing?"

"An unknown genetic sample that was taken from the dead colonist and the threat I fear it may be." Light quickly analyzed the two samples just as he did with the prior batch, highlighting similarities between the two with a number of notable differences. "My speculation was accurate." Light rushed down within the Normandy traveling down into the garage.

Garrus was preparing the Mako to be transferred so Shepard could traverse the rest of the colony. He noticed the elevator door opening as Light and the security team moved toward him. "What's going on?"

"Excuse me Mr. Vakarian, but I must warn the Reclaimers of the unseen threat hidden on the colony but it must be done without alerting the threat itself of our awareness of it."

"So that means the radios are out." Garrus looked back at the Mako, "Can't we at least tell them you're going to be waiting for them with a message?"

"Yes, that would be vague enough that shouldn't alert it."

"Just out of personally curiosity," Garrus looked away for a moment, "what is this threat?"

Lamenting Light was hesitant to even speak of it, as it floated past Garrus and to the hatch of the Mako. Just before it entered, Light turned back, "The very same threat that nearly destroyed my creators and almost brought an end to all civilization. The Parasite."

* * *

><p>AN: **Sorry to leave it hanging like that but you'll see what's what soon enough. I could use some help(if anyone's willing) with conceiving a cover art for the story.

21. Chapter 21

**A/N: **I'm implementing a new thing during dialog, "_italicizing__radio chatter_"

* * *

><p>O'Brien continued to provide cover fire for the others at the entrance of the tower as more geth deployed from the dropship that was sitting above the broken roof. The geth continued to deploy against the group as the close quarter combat got more intense. Shepard, Ashley and Tali disposed of geth with shotguns before they had a chance to deploy. Six and Cortez were using their combat knives to sever their spinal tubes while Sork continued to toss geth to the others or destroying them himself with a swift jab of his gauntlet's energy daggers or crushing them under his hoof.<p>

The dropship deployed one last geth, a destroyer unit before fleeing the fight itself. Sork wasted no time and sliced the bulky mech in two with an energy sword. Sork let out a roar to the hole in the roof as he stepped on the remains of the geth destroyer.

"_Uh Commanderâ€|_"

"What is it, Joker?"

"_Just a head's up, that floating flashlight is waiting for you guys in the Mako with some sort of urgent message or something._"

Shepard looked to Six as she responded, "How urgent are we talking about?"

"_It won't let me say over the comms. It says they're not secure enough for the 'threat' it has to warn you about. I think it's just having a meltdown without Six or Cortez._"

"Thanks for the update."

O'Brian stopped Sork, "So what's your take on the situation, squid-head?"

"The humans of this world seem afraid, though I feel as though I am not the only reason for this unusual fear. They hide something from us, possibly the very reason why the geth are here. Be on your guard, imp, for you of all of the humans I've observed not only put yourself in harm's way, but force others to save you because of it. Pray they do not sacrifice more than needed for you." Unaware that he hit a rather personal subject.

Shepard inspected her shotgun as she started to leave the tower, "Come on. Let's update Fai Dan and the colonist that the immediate threat from the geth is gone for the moment."

* * *

><p>The Covenant Spec Op team was rummaging through one of the destroyed tower like scavengers as a geth patrol walked past them. Soon enough one of the Uggnoy started to complain, "Half a cycle on this planet. When are we leaving?"<p>

The sub-commander grabbed the Uggnoy by his breathing mask, "We leave when we find the artifact. Less you wish to join the geth in their assault on the humans and the Thorian."

The Uggnoy quickly cowered as he tried to distance himself from his superior, "No, no, I go back to looking, Excellency. No more complaining!"

The other Uggnoy scurried off to continue the search elsewhere as one of the Sangheili warriors now approached, "Sub-Commander, do you really believe an artifact of the gods rest on this decaying world? There are no signs of their technology and even the Jiralhanae might find it difficult to live on such a decrepit planet. Could the Prophet be wrong about this?"

The sub-commander gazed upon the various skyscrapers still standing above the cloud cover. "I have my doubts, but if we return empty handed and the geth succeed in their mission we will look incompetent. We must find something."

A series of screeches echoed through the tunnels as three Skirmishers jumped down from the holes in the roof. "We found it. Roughly eight stories up, surrounded by masses of tendrils. They moved, they attacked us."

"The tendrils moved? Are you sure you didn't simply fail to notice a falling piece of debris that moved it?"

The Skirmisher's feathers started to rustle as it shrieked at the Spec-Op soldier, "You think me for a fool, Sangheili? The tendrils surrounding our query attacked us! They killed two of my kin!"

The sub-commander examined the Skirmishers closely as he found signs of battle on their persons; their feathers were ruffled as though they struggled to fight free from something's hold, the leader's left Point Defense Gauntlet was crushed and one of the Skirmisher's legs was injured. "We shall proceed with caution. Lead us to the artifact. Now." The three Skirmishers ran off ahead as the Sangheili and Uggnoy followed.

* * *

><p>Having informed Fai Dan about the current situation, spoken with several of the colonists, and restocked their supplies with the salarian merchant Ledra, Shepard took a moment to speak with the team in front of the elevator. "I think we need to split up, one team to find what the geth are after and while the other to help the colonists reestablish themselves."<p>

Cortez stepped up, "I'll stay behind and help the colonists."

"O'Brian should stay too."

"Great, another mission I don't have to worry about ugly trying to kill me."

Cortez socked O'Brian in the arm, "Six is right. You're a great shot but at close quarters we're expected to find in the other building, it may put you in the hot seat."

"I'll stay with them too," Ashley remarked.

"I can't force you to do this, Chief."

"Don't worry, Commander, we'll be fine."

"Then let us be off," Sork activated the elevator console, "the Oracle awaits us."

As the elevator door closed, Ash couldn't help but let out a sigh of relief. "You can't stand split lip either?"

"Every time I see him and that sword I can't help to remember 212 as his kind slaughtered them all so easily."

Cortez rested a hand on her shoulder, "You were unprepared and you'd never fought against an enemy so powerful or tactically superior before. You didn't even know they existed before that day. Don't blame yourself, if anything you should be commended for surviving so long on your own."

"Hey you know what'll cheer you up? Blasting some geth. Let's go find some while we look for the water valves and all of that stuff for the colonists."

* * *

><p>Lamenting Light was forced to act to destroy a group of geth recon drones that had gained access to the garage where the Mako was loaded into. The elevator opened as Lamenting Light finished dispatching with the bothersome pests. With the presence of the two colonists, Lamenting Light played his role as a VI unit rather well, "Master, all hostile forces have been terminated. We may proceed with your objective."<p>

The team entered the Mako and sealed the hatch to speak with Light, "OK Light, what is it you needed to tell us about?"

"Forgive the inconvenience but I could not risk the lives of the Reclaimers if the infestation has saturated to such aâ€|"

"Just tell us."

"Of course, Reclaimer. As I was examining the geth you terminated just outside of the Normandy, I decided to examine the deceased human, for curiosities sake. My sensors detected genetic material not originating from the human. I did not wish to jump to a conclusion,

so using _Normandy_'s systems, I determined the truth about the foreign genetic material. My analysis concluded that the human was infected by the Flood."

"We need to warn Cortez and the others."

"I would not recommend that, Reclaimer. If infection is as far spread within the colonists as the _Normandy_'s sensors have determined, that would only doom them."

"The Flood?"

Sork snarled as he replied to Tali's question, "The Parasite. An ancient enemy of the goâ€|the Forerunners," forcing himself to stop viewing them in such light, "Many within the Covenant believe they are but one of many trials we had to overcome in order to achieve the Great Journey. It is also written on several ancient texts of how the Forerunner purged the Parasite from existence when the Great Journey had commenced. It seems that is not the case."

Lamenting Light seemed rather vexed by Sork and his perversion of history, "The Parasite is not a force one can simply conquer. With every new victim consumed or converted, the Flood gains all knowledge they knew. We must initiate a planetary purge of all organic matter immediately before the Flood can have a chance to escape."

Shepard grabbed Light, "No one is purging anything. You got me?"

Light didn't seemed bothered, as it's glow intensified for a moment, "The lives of roughly thirty humans are nothing compared to the devastation the Flood will bring should they be allowed to expand beyond this star system."

Tali still wasn't sure the 'precautions' were even necessary, "Can't we somehow remove this Flood from them instead of purging everything?"

Light directed itself toward the young quarian, "Quarian, from the technological achievement tiers my creators used to assess species, this galaxy stands roughly at a Tier-3, the Forerunners were a Tier-1. The Forerunner had attempted every possible means they could to remove or sterilize the Flood from infected hosts, all experiments were a failure and all subjects were terminated before infestation over took them. We cannot allow the Flood to escape. Initiate planetary bombardment now before the Flood realize we know of their existence."

"I agree with the Oracle, we must glass the entire planet to ensure every last Flood spore has been destroyed."

"And the rest of the colonists?"

"Their sacrifice will mean the rest of the galaxy will not have to suffer the same fate. Or are you not willing to commit to the tough decisions that must be done, demon?"

Six wanted to punch Sork, and given his bad eye she could, but instead pointed something out, "Light, when the Flood infect a victim, you said the host's physiology is changed."

"Down to the very last cell."

"Then why is it that the colonists looked normal?" This caused Light to pause for a moment. "Lamenting Light, were there any genetic differences between these spores and a Flood spore?"

Light quickly answered Six's question, "Yes, a 2.63879% difference was present from the samples I had available and the Flood sample from my records."

"That seems too small of a variable to be coincidence."

Lamenting Light took a moment to think about Shepard's consideration to re-review the data. "You are correct human. Now that I'm reevaluating the data, the mutations were too select to be through natural selection." Lamenting Light just remembered something, "The Primordial claimed that the Precursors created the Flood in retaliation to my creator's 'rebellion' against them. The Precursors were believed to have been a Tie-0 civilization, with the ability to accelerate evolution and traverse galaxies. If the Precursors had the capable of traversing the universal plane, such as us, then it could theoretically be possible that this specimen is the genetic base, or even a test specimen, which lead to the Flood. If that is the case then we must secure a large enough sample size for testing purposes to find a weakness, or possibly even a solution, to the Flood."

Shepard released her grip on Light, "One step at a time you. We get to the ExoGeni building and find what the geth are after. If we find anything relating to this Flood thing, then we'll go chase after it." Shepard stopped it before it could comment, "Only after we deal with the geth. Understood?"

Lamenting Light seemed perplexed by the unusual priority but it seemed to understand, "Very well Commander, we will proceed as you see fit. Though, should the Parasite escape, we will know whose choice lead to that end."

* * *

><p>Cortez, O'Brien and Ashley found the three valves to the water supply, along with groups of geth holding the tunnels. As the trio continued down the path they found an estranged man, just standing around the rubble alone. "You don't want to go down there!"<p>

"What are you doing down here?" Cortez demanded.

"Nothing I should be. Anything I shouldn't. NOOOOO!" The man screamed as though something was tearing at him from the inside. The strange man stood back up after the subsequent pain trying to shake it off, "That was a good one. Very intense."

O'Brien jokingly told Ash, "This guy's taken a few too many shots at the glass."

He seemed to have overheard O'Brien's comment, correcting him, "No, just invoking the master's whip. Helps remind me I'm still alive." The man paused before he suddenly changed the subject, "You're here for the geth, aren't you? You're not the only one interested in

those things."

Williams didn't like the sound of that, "Who else is looking for the geth?"

The man corrected her, "Not looking for, looking to get rid of. They're a thorn in the side of the." Something was stopping the man from telling anything relevant as he let out a pain filled scream. The man struggle as he tried to continue, "Trying to get to the" again he was stopped by the pain as he was laughing at it all now.

Ashley was no longer able or willing to watching the man continue as she stated, "Come on guys, we should just leave him be."

O'Brien turn to Cortez, "Maybe we should end his suffering. Not unless he wants to"

He smiled at O'Brien's comment, "I've thought about that. Several times. I would rather die fighting." The man was still struggling with something, at least in his mind.

"Fighting what?"

"Not that kind of fight. It's like running through a thorn bush. The more you struggle Time's up. Company's coming. Ask Fai Dan. Ask him about the" "aaaaagh!" the squad turned away as the man fell to the ground in pain.

As the team turned back to the tunnel they spot a pair of geth troopers trying to sneak up from behind. "Look out!"

The trio split as they took cover. Ashley and O'Brien distracted the geth long enough for Cortez to toss a grenade to the machines. Cortez joined the distraction long enough for the grenade to do its job. With the area cleared, Cortez regrouped with O'Brien and Williams, "Those geth had to come from somewhere. Let's check the passageways we passed earlier."

Cortez and Williams flanked the door as O'Brien steadied the sniper rifle. Cortez opened the door, O'Brien spotted a sniper perched on a small platform and took it out before the geth had a chance to target them. As the sniper fell to the ground another geth jumped down to fight. Ashley and Cortez handled it as O'Brien shot down a drone that tried to target Ashley.

* * *

><p>Traveling along the skyway, Tali picked up on a weak signal emanating from the tower ahead. Shepard decided to investigate the signal despite Sork and Lamenting Light's disapproval. Light stayed to watch over the Mako as the others moved to investigate. Before walking down the ramp, Sork activated his active camouflage so the humans wouldn't react, should they have seen any member of the Covenant during the assault. As they walked out of the shadows, the two security officers took aim behind makeshift barriers as a corporate man aimed at Shepard with a pistol, "That's close enough."<p>

An older woman beside him lowered his arm, "Relax, Jeong. They're

obviously not geth."

The man however didn't seem to listen to her as quickly raised his arm again and started to wave the pistol at the squad, "Get back Juliana. Who are you? What do you want?"

"Commander Shepard. I'm here to remove your geth problem."

The woman smiled as she tried to calm the man down again, "You see? You worry too much."

"And you trust too easily, Juliana." Jeong quick snapped, something Six noticed as she kept her DMR in hand, as she heard Sork let out a faint growl of resentment.

Juliana on the other hand was grateful, "I'm just glad to see a friendly face. I thought we were the only humans left on this planet."

Shepard corrected her statement, "Fai Dan and some of the members of Zhu's Hope are still alive."

Juliana turned to Jeong, scornful, "I thought you said they were all dead."

"I said they were 'probably' all deadâ€|"

Tali added to the Commander's correction, "They live, though the geth have devastated their colony."

Juliana recalled the initial attack and the subsequent waves soon after, "We know what that's like. Those damn synthetics are relentless."

Six however was more interested in any other hostiles, "Are geth the only things you've encountered?"

Juliana wasn't sure why she asked, giving the strangely armored woman a vaguely confused face, "There are varren, but they were here before we even established the colony. Someone did mention something about krogans, though I wouldn't put much merit behind that though. I mean, synthetics working with organics, that's outrageous."

With that information however, Six seemed more troubled then before. Shepard assured the people, as she addressed them all, "I'll do whatever I can to keep them away from you. But I need some information."

"What kind of information?" Jeong asked in a rather suspicious tone, weary of the Commander.

Juliana shook her head, "Ignore him. The geth are up in the ExoGeni headquarters. Just a bit further along the skyway."

Jeong had to add before the Commander thought about leaving, "Those headquarters are private property, soldier. Remove the geth and nothing else."

Shepard tried to ease the corporate man, "I'm not interested in your company secrets."

As Shepard was about to leave, Juliana stopped them, "Commander, before you goâ€|My daughter, Lizbeth. She's missingâ€|"

Jeong refuted, "They shouldn't waste time poking around. We can do a proper account of our casualties after the geth are gone."

Juliana almost fell to her motherly anger to sock Jeong, but she kept her composure and reduced it to a shout, "That's my daughter you're talking about! She's still alive. I know it."

Six, unexpectedly, was the one to ask her, "Where was your daughter last, ma'am?"

"She was working in the ExoGeni building when the attacks came."

Jeong was skeptical, "Oh yeah! There are several places she could hide. For a short time."

Sork then whispered between them, "And if a special operations team has been dispatched to this world, her likely hood of survival drops even further."

Even Dot had her doubts, "Noble Six, the Elite is correct. The probability of Lizbeth's survival for so long against both geth and Covenant forces is doubtful. The mathematics are determinate."

Six ignored Dot and Sork's comments, "Commander?"

Shepard didn't understand why Six suddenly offered assured her to find Lizbeth, and even if Shepard didn't want to look, Six probably would without them. "If she's in there, we'll get her out."

"Thank you, Commander. Thank you."

* * *

><p>AN: **Yeah, I called them Skirmishers, only because they and Jackals are the same species(different sub-species) so I'm just going to refer to the bulkier cousins by the human designation, though in conversations with Covenant species they'll be referred as Kig-yar. I'm sorry, I forgot to explain a Covenant cycle and its human equivalent. A cycle is roughly one artificial day on their holy city, High Charity(basically Omega in shape and build but 7 times bigger and mobile) and a cycle is at minimum 265 units(roughly 265 Earth hours).

22. Chapter 22

**A/N: **I'm creating a sequel to From One Doomed Galaxy to Another soon enough, now I just need cover art and a title. And with the EC out I can say it satisfied a few things but not enough to justify the ending in ME3(to me).

* * *

><p>O'Brien put another sniper round into a charging krogan while Cortez was forced to use the MA37 he carried to riddle the brute with

even more bullets. "These things just don't know when to die!"<p>

"Keep it up, only one more to go!"

The krogan rammed head first into a cinder block barrier, cracking it in two as he attempting to get to Williams. O'Brien staggered it back with a clean shot through one of his hearts, giving Ashley enough time to move away to join Cortez in finishing the bruiser. "That was a little too intenseâ€|"

"No kidding. I think that Brute chieftain from Heian was easier than those three."

Cortez took a moment to look at the dead krogans, "Something doesn't feel right. Wrex fights better than these ones did."

"Come on Cortez, he's what, over a thousand years old now. I'd think someone who's lived that long might know a thing or two about fighting."

"That's not it." Cortez removed the helmet off one of the krogan corpses, "We've tangled with krogan mercs before, but the way they attacked, it's as if they weren't krogan. You know?"

O'Brien pat his friend on the back, "Cortez, Cortez. Something you think too much about little things like that."

"Hey, over here." Cortez and O'Brien hurried over as they saw what Ashley found, "Look like we know why they were holding this position." The krogans were guarding a geth transmitter, probably used to coordinate their assault against Zhu's Hope. "Time for some demolition," Williams said as she held a grenade in her hand.

O'Brien kept watch of their entry as Cortez helped set the charge. The two quickly retreated back to O'Brien's position before the explosive detonated, blasting the tower in two. "Now all that's left is to kill some varren, find a power cell and report it all back to the colonists."

"I think I heard something on the other side of those doors on the other wall. We might find some varren in there."

* * *

><p>The Illusive Man was reviewing scattered reports of strange alien vessels allegedly destroying entire supply convoys and rarely leaving anyone alive afterward. "I'm rather disappointed about the lack of information, Director."<p>

The hologram of the ONI official pulled up several files, "I assure you, we're doing everything in our power to locate Saren's base of operation. But with these recent attacks, it seems he might be aware of our operation."

"I'm fully aware of the situation with Saren, what I was referring to was the lack of information on your Spartan, Noble Six."

The director pulled out her dossier file, "She is not one of my

SPARTANs, as you put it. She is one of Ackerson's, or so I believe. I remember all seventy-five STARTAN candidates Halsey had chosen, all thirty-three that survived the augmentation process and weren't disabled by it." The director waited for the Illusive Man to start reading though what little there was to read from Six's dossier, "As you can see, there's little much to deliver, beyond her proficiency at killing. If you're concerned about her allegiance, then that shouldn't be a problem. So long as she believes Cerberus is doing everything it can to protect and advance human interest."

Releasing another puff of smoke, "That's a lot to put into faith, Director."

"If she ever does decide to leave, all we'd have to do is follow the trail of bodies and destruction left in her wake. Though, she will vanish if we aren't fast enough."

* * *

><p>Shepard drove the Mako through the geth resistance proved to be rather strong. While on the way Six conferred with Lamenting Light, "Light, go into detail about the two percent difference."<p>

"2.63879%, Reclaimer. The genetic structure of the Flood has five more base pairs compared to these samples. Eight original base pairs have been altered to accommodate the changes in form and function. I must note how flawless these alterations were, Reclaimer. Why even my initial assessments seemed to suggest they were natural."

"Why do the Forerunners not mention the Precursors in any of the ancient texts?" Sork questioned to the sudden outburst prior.

"That is because the Didact did not trust spreading word that it was the Precursors who unleashed the Parasite in the first place. The Forerunners once believed they inherited the Mantle from the Precursors to protect the galaxy. Even as the war came to a close, the Didact ordered that information on the Primordial be circulated only among the top leaders and a few high-level constructs who would journey with them, such as myself."

The Mako reached the entrance to the ExoGeni building with the doors stuck open wide enough for an Elite, but not for the Mako. Sork disembarked from the vehicle before Tali spotted geth hoppers. Shepard tried to gun them down but they moved too fast for the Mako's cannon to keep up. Six however wasn't going to let that stop her. She had left the vehicle too as she started to follow one of the hoppers with her M392 DMR, waiting for it to stop. It did, on the roof as it targeted her. Five quick pulls of the trigger and Six broke through the shield and its eye, falling the machine. Sork grabbed it in mid-fall and tossed it at the second hopper, knocking it out of the air. The Elite warrior rushed off to the downed geth to finish it, ignoring the geth to his left as they opened fire on him. The rubble in the area provided plenty of cover and the hopper's location was out of their view, forcing the Spartan to fight against them alone until Tali and Shepard came to her aid.

* * *

><p>Williams, Cortez and O'Brien had returned to Zhu's Hope baring

the wonderful news about destroying the geth transmitter, securing new power cells from a damaged M29 Grizzly tank, reestablishing a clean water supply, and clearing out the bothersome varren alpha and his pack. Cortez inquired about the strange man they meant below however Fai Dan tried to assure them that Ian was simply sick but there was nothing that could be done for the time being.<p>

Cortez had them convene inside the crashed frigate to discuss recent events privately. "You have to admit, something doesn't feel right."

"Yeah, I can feel it. But what can we do? We helped them out with everything they needed and no one wants to talk."

"Exactly. An invasion like this should have people scared, worrying about if they'll ever see loved ones or another day. Here, they still fear for their lives but something else is taking precedence."

Ash looked out the view port to some of the colonists at work, "Sometimes a good leader can help people forget those kinds of things. You know, give them hope that a tomorrow is still there."

Cortez still couldn't accept it, "Good leader or not, there should be someone willing to talk."

O'Brien still didn't believe in the gravity of a situation Cortez was making it out to be, laying back in a chair and placing his boots on a nearby table, "You keep worrying about that, I'll worry about when the geth decide to attack again." As O'Brien started to get comfortable, the door opened as Arcelia and Greta Reynolds entered. "Hey ladies, what can weâ€|" Arcelia bashed the butt of her rifle against O'Brien's head, collapsing the ODS.

Ashley and Cortez took aim but Greta put a pistol to O'Brien's visor, "Drop your weapons."

Cortez's visor depolarized as he turned to Williams. "They have this one, Chief." Cortez then gently and slowly placed down his M7S, Automag and MA37 before raising his hands.

Ashely was hesitant to relinquish her arms, but given the situation, she had no choice, turning the magnets off on her suit while Arcelia took the pistol from her hand. Arcelia restrained their arms down before separating them. No word as to why or even any notion of a deal with the geth. Cortez watched from the window as the colonists armed themselves with weapons the merchant Ledra was carrying.

* * *

><p>The Skirmishers trio stopped just outside of a damaged door. "Here! Inside is where the artifact and the tentacles are." The trio stepped back, letting the sub-commander forced the doors open with his hands. Inside the room he found purple blood stains on the floor and walls before finally finding one of the missing scouts. The body had been severed at the abdomen with its organs spattered on the floor and wall. A powerful force had pinned the Skirmisher to the wall before it snapped the bird like a toothpick. The floor closest to the window however had claw marks leading out to the window. Seeing the rapid successions of markings he determined the second

Skirmisher was pulled out of the room by its leg before falling to its doom, or worse. There was a second grouping of claw marks on the floor, though unlike the others, stopping only a few inches from where it started.<p>

The sub-commander signaled his men to enter, a group of Uggnoy armed with Needlers and Plasma Pistols lined up followed by four Sangheili warriors; two armed with two Plasma Rifles, another carried a Plasma Repeater and last carried a Type-51 Carbine. The Sangheili could smell the decay in the air as they tightened their grips, ready to fire at a moment's notice.

The rest of the Uggnoy watched from the doorway as the sub-commander Vaht 'Komtaree drew his blade on the moving tendril, "Open fire!" The team relentlessly shot at every inch of the tendril as every seventh Needler crystal exploded, Vaht sliced the smaller tentacles that tried to grab his soldiers. There was a massive roar that came from below before the tentacles retreated back down a hole they covered in the middle of the room. Vaht noticed that the dead Skirmisher was now missing, the blood trails leading off toward the hole the tentacles had retreated down. "Secure the area, I don't want those things coming back without our knowing."

"Sub-Commander! The holy relic!" It seems the presence of the Energy Sword caused it to react, possibly even repelling the tendrils as well. Vaht carefully approached the artifact with the Energy Sword still drawn. The sphere started to glow even brighter and brighter until it was blinding. Vaht grabbed the orb from its pedestal and the glowing stopped. Vaht carefully carried the artifact back to the others to view and admire.

"Sub-Commander!" Another Sangheili warrior entered through the door, "Sub-Commander! The geth have sighted the heretic Light of Sanghelios and the humans entering the tower. What are your orders?"

Vaht looked down to the artifact for a moment before making his decision. "Take the holy relic back to the ship. Secure it and prepare to leave when I return. I will handle them personally."

* * *

><p>With a coordinated strike with Sork 'Tasuvai, Commander Shepard, Tali and Six cleared the entrance of geth along with a hidden armature folded within a side passage. They were now faced with a new problem, "Typical geth deployment. Well need another route in." Sork even tested the barrier with his Energy Sword, but to no avail.<p>

Six's scans however found something else, "Commander." The team gathered to Six who was a few feet away from the barrier. "A one way drop. But it should connect us to the other side of that barrier."

'Tasuvai jumped down first as he carefully scouted the area. Turning the corner, he could smell the blood of an animal nearby. Turning so his good eye could see, Sork found a dog-like creature with a massive jaw and black and red scales. As Sork took this time to examine the bullet holes he found in its skull, a shot graced his helmet, almost causing the energy shield to react. Sork grabbed the animal's body as an extra shield so he could rush his attacker. He could feel more

shots entering the carcass. He heard the weapon release steam in a similar manner to when a Covenant plasma weapon overheats. With his opening, Sork tossed the body and rushed at his assailant. Sork grabbed it by the throat, a human female in clothing similar to the last group of humans they encountered on this world. Sork removed the weapon from her hand as he slowly started to squeeze her small neck. The woman tried to fight back, punching and kicking but Sork's armor and conditioning allowed him to ignore the pain.

Before Sork could kill the woman, Six aimed her M392 on his bad eye, "Release her."

Sork released a growl instead, but he soon dropped the woman as he warned Six, "You are too charitable to your own kind, demon."

The woman couldn't understand a word he said as she immediately tried to get distance between herself and Sork. Six attached her weapon to her back as she tried to help her up, "Your safe ma'am," extending her hand out.

Shepard and Tali arrived to see some of it what had transpired. They could hear the gun fire but that still didn't excuse Sork's actions to Tali. Even with Shepard and Tali, the woman screamed out, "No, he's one of them! He's going to kill us all!"

Shepard retrieved the pistol, understanding her distrust toward Sork, "It's alright, this one's on our side. At least he is usually," Shepard handed back her pistol, "So if you wouldn't mind explaining what you're doing here in the first place?"

The woman hesitantly took the pistol while keeping her eye on the Sork, "Iâ€¦It's my own damn fault. Everyone else was running and I stayed to back up data. Next thing I knew, the geth ship latched on and the power went out. I was trapped. I tried to get out, but the way was blocked. As I hide, I found others who were also trapped, though they were cut down, by things that looked like him."

"The geth won't stop us."

The woman stopped Six before she walked away, "It's not the geth. It's the energy field they put up. They don't want anyone else getting access to theâ€¦" staggering off as she tried to distance herself from them again.

Shepard placed herself between the woman and Sork in an attempt to help give her comfort, "We're here for the geth. It's very important that we find out what they're after."

"I don't know for certain," the woman was hesitant, though she quickly thought of something, "but I'm guessing they're here for the Thorian."

"Thorian? What is that exactly?" asked the confused quarian.

"It's an indigenous life-form. ExoGeni was studying it."

Six pulled Sork away so Shepard may continue to get more intel from her, "What else can you tell us about the Thorian? Do you know where we can find it?"

She thought about it, "I might be able to, but not with these geth crawling around everywhere."

"Any suggestions?"

"No, not exactly," though she quickly noted, "But I think the geth ship is powering it. I've noticed the geth laying power cable everywhere."

"Tell me what you know about the Thorian."

"I really don't know that much about it. I think it's some kind of plant being. I know it's very old. Thousands of years, even."

"Why do you think the geth would be interested in the Thorian?"

"It's just a plant. I don't know why the geth would care. ExoGeni was studying it, but I don't think they found anything special."

"Could you tell us a little about yourself?"

"I'm just a research assistant for ExoGeni. I came here with my mother. I don't even know if she made it out alive."

"Wait," Six turned around, "Lizbeth Baynham?"

"Yesâ€|"

"Your mother, Juliana, asked us to search for you. She and several other ExoGeni personnel have fortified themselves in a fairly defensible position along the skyway."

This news was obviously a relief to Lizbeth, "She's alive? Thank God. I thought I was the only one left. Please, just get that field down so I can see my mother again."

Shepard placed her hand on Lizbeth's shoulder, "You should stay put. We'll go open some doors."

Lizbeth stopped the Commander, grabbing her arm, "Here, take my ID. This should get you past any locked doors. Good luck with that field." Lizbeth quickly retreated back to a hole that was created into a wall.

With Lizbeth gone, Sork pulled out the Plasma Rifle, "Be on your guard. I smell more of these creatures, and they seek blood." A lone varren had them in its sights as it let out a roar, calling others nearby to join.

* * *

><p>"O'Brienâ€|O'Brien, wake upâ€|"<p>

"Ughâ€|" O'Brien rolled over onto his back, "Ahâ€|my headâ€|I feel like I went through a drinking contest with Dutchâ€|and wonâ€|"

"Stop moving so much. It'll only get worse."

As feeling returned to his body, O'Brien finally realized the gravity of their situation, "What the hell happened? How'd we end up like this? Where's Cortez?"

"Arcelia knocked you out while one of the security guards put a pistol to your head. We had no choice but to let them take us. They took all of our weapons and gear so we couldn't contact the others. Then they separated us. I guess they didn't think you'd be waking up anytime soon."

"Thank God for my helmet being made out of titanium and the extra padding inside." O'Brien slowly rolled over to see the room they were locked in, "So what's going on outside?"

Ash pulled away from the window before one of the colonist could see her, "A lot of movement. They've been gearing up and bunkering down for an assault. And I don't think they're worried about the geth."

"I'm more concerned about what they're using our gear for."

"What's the matter, O'Brien? Afraid they might trick Six and the others?"

"Oh no, we don't have to worry about that. I'm more concerned about getting it all back in one piece. Though we should start planning our escape, or at the very least free our hands." O'Brien rolled off the stretcher bed and woozily got to his feet.

Ashley lowered herself to about knee level to O'Brien with her back toward him, "Grab two of my bobby pins so we can pick each other's locks." As O'Brien started searching through her bun, he started to laugh. "What's so funny?"

"Oh, no nothing, just, it's just funny. To think that I'm trapped in this room with a lovely young woman like you. Though the position could be better and, oh yeah, everything else about this is a piece of shit, but hey, at least we have this moment together, right?"

Ash started to laugh now too, "Your crap at romance, you know that O'Brien."

"Hey what can I say, it's a gift."

* * *

><p>AN: **Got pretty far here, let see what the Flood has under its slimy tentacles as Shepard and the others deal with the geth.

23. Chapter 23

**A/N: **Can't say I've been better, but it hasn't been bad either. Oh the woe is the way of things it seemsâ€¦|

* * *

><p>"Damn it. Tell me what I want or I'll blast your virtual ass into actual dust!"<p>

The holographic man, unable to feel fear or any other emotion, responded with its preprogramed response, "Please contact your supervisor for a Level 4 security exemption or make an appointment withâ€" "

"Stupid machine!" The krogan kicked the holodisplay, causing the VI's image to lose its integrity for a moment before reconstituting the image.

"If there is nothing else, please step aside. There is a queue forming behind you for the use of this console."

The krogan turned around but saw nothing. "Machine must be malfunctioning or someâ€" | "

The krogan could feel a strange piece that was touching his armor, though he still couldn't see anything. He grabbed for his shotgun but was too late. A force socked him in the chest as a bright blue light pierced his armor and his back. The light was precisely positioned, cutting into both of his hearts. The krogan grabbed at what he believed to be the arms only to find one arm. The air started to flicker with life as the being appeared. It was one of the Sangheili but his armor was different from the team that was dispatched with him and the geth.

It took the krogan a moment, but the ornamental design of the armor gave it away, he was the one the Covenant wanted dead, the Light of Sanghelios. Unlike the image the Covenant provided the Light of Sanghelios was missing the large curved ornamental horns on his helmet and his right eye was burned. Before the krogan could alert the geth, the Sangheili pulled the light across the krogan's body, cutting everything in the light's path.

The Sangheili quickly delivered a punch with his left arm to send the krogan to the floor. The krogan's orange blood started to soak the ground as he choked on it as well. The only thing keeping the krogan in one piece was the fact that the Light of Sanghelios didn't cut from shoulder to ribcage. As a mercy, the Light of Sanghelios rose his hoof up before caving the krogan's face into his skull.

* * *

><p>With the area cleared of the hostile, Shepard and Six walked over to find the bloody mess. "Are you sure you did enough?"<p>

"Of course. We study our enemies well." Sork tipped the body over toward the entrance using the krogan's hump. "Like us, it had two hearts. A simultaneous attack on both hearts disables the opponent. While in a state of shock I cut through as much of the body as possible while letting it lose much of its honor. As a mercy I ended it quickly for it. Where I not in such a mood I would let it bleed to death."

"Oh dear. What a mess you interlopers can cause." Lamenting Light fluttered into the area as Tali was now behind Six and Shepard.

The VI's sensors openly scanned the group as it highlighted Shepard. "Welcome back, Research Assistant Elizabeth Baynham. What can I do for you?"

Shepard wasn't exactly flattered to be mixed up for Lizbeth. "Uh, how do you know I'm Lizbeth?"

The VI unit calmly stated to the group, "Your access card identifies you as Elizabeth Baynham. Is there something you require Dr. Baynham?"

Shepard didn't like being mistaken for another, though she wasn't going to let this opportunity to gain information pass her, "What information was the last user attempting to access?"

"Fetching data." The VI took a moment to find the information, "The previous user was attempting to access details on the study of Subject Species 37, the Thorian."

"Tell me everything you told the krogan."

"I was unable to provide the previous user with any relevant data. Aside from lacking proper access, there has been no new data available on Species 37. All sensors monitoring the observation post at Zhu's Hope have been inactive for several cycles."

Shepard quickly demanded answers from the VI, "What does Zhu's Hope have to do with the Thorian?"

"Species 37 is located within the substructure of the Zhu's Hope outpost."

Six turned to the floating monitor, "Light? Think you can speed this up?"

"Of course, Recalimer. My original reason for existence was data management for research stations several times larger than this small outpost." Lamenting Light fluttered over to the computer as he started interfacing. A small blue beam of light shot out of Light's eye as it directly hit the computer.

"Warning: Unknown user detected within archives. Acti-activating-ing fire-fire-fire-firewalls and anti-virus prograâ€|" The VI's image disappeared as a massive tendril appeared.

"I have gained full access of this research facility." Now spore samples appeared on the holodisplay, "Spore infection rate is significantly slower compared to the Flood. The basic form of the spores share many aesthetic commonalitiesâ€|"

"Light!"

The images stopped as the monitor turned to Shepard. "ExoGeni have classified the Thorian as a 'simple' plant life-form. The only sign of the 'Thorian' ExoGeni has uncovered are massive tendrils that sprawl across the planet's surface and the ruins built upon it, transferring sensory dataâ€| How fascinating. Roughly 85% of the Zhu's Hope population was infected before the geth cut all landlines connecting this facility to the sensors monitoring the control group. Inhalation is the only means of infestation. Fret not, as massive quantities of these Thorian spores are required before it can gain control. Intriguing. I now understand the similarities. The Thorian manipulates its hosts to follow its commands of needs by providing

pain or pleasure to the nervous system where as the Flood attack the very same system in order to alter and convert. From this data, it appears to require a time span of weeks before the spore's true nature becomes apparent within the host. If it was the Flood they would only require a hand full in order to start the infection immediately."

Shepard grabbed her assault rifle, "Ok team, let's shut down that field and get back to Zhu's Hope."

"A moment, Commander," Light floated away from the computer for a moment as the hologram started to display Lizbeth. "I have found a rather interesting note about the human you recently encountered. It seems ExoGeni has placed her under probation due to discontent with her manager about the Zhu's Hope control group, specifically how the company managed the infected. Reclaimer, she knew more about the situation than she had initially informed you."

Six turned to Shepard, expecting her to give a response, to which she did. "We'll deal with that matter after we deal with the geth. Keep your priority straight." Light returned to the computer to purge all data and evidence of his interaction with the system.

Shepard led the team through the building before stopping in a new room. The room was heavily damaged by a claw that had forced its way into the room. Shepard crept in finding two geth as they appeared to be worshipping a strange blinding light. Sork jumped down as his gauntlets activated the energy daggers. His training was put to the test as the massive Elite quietly moved up on the two geth. In a flash, Sork jabbed the energy daggers into the necks of the geth, nearly severing their heads.

With the area cleared, the team moved up to examine the claw. "The geth use these claws to anchor their ships to the sides of buildings."

Six tried pulling one of the tubes but quickly left it be. "We don't have the equipment to remove this. Any suggestions?"

Tali pondered as she used her omni-tool to scan the structure. "It will be difficult. We can check the other claws for weaknesses, but the geth are very thorough."

Light scanned every inch of the claw. "Efficient. However I have found a few minor flaws in this method of docking. Namely, the loss of one of these claws while still supplying power, could cause a system overload, coupled with the weight distribution problem, the ship will fall."

Sork on the other hand, was more interested in the strange structure the geth had built next to the claw. "This seemsâ€¦familiarâ€¦almost holy in this state."

Tali had never heard about geth building such structures before. "The geth blur the line between organic and synthetic life. It's natural to assume they seek understanding from a higher power."

Six's motion tracker detected a hostile, and it wasn't Sork. Dot has adjusted her systems to register Sork as an 'ally' for the time being. If she could detect it, Six was almost certain Sork suit could

as well. Six slowly turned around as Light moved to the other side of the claw for further examination.

Six drew her M392 on Sork, an action Tali immediately disapproved of. The young quarian stepped into the line of fire but Six had no intention of firing. She was using Tali's movement to get a better idea of where this new target was. The sensor spotted the target again just as Tali moved. This was what Six was hoping for. The Spartan adjusted her aim. Without warning Sork drew out his blade as he too now was looking at the same area Six was targeting. "Come out. If you seek death, you have found it."

"Steady your weapons. I have not come here to fight." An Elite Spec Op decloaked with his helmet in one arm as he was down on one knee to Sork. Even with his appearance, Shepard pulled her pistol on the Elite just as Six continued to aim her rifle at him. "Light of Sanghelios, I wish to hear an answer with your own words."

"And should I not provide what you seek?"

"Then our blades must cross."

There was a low growl from Sork before he finally started to speak. "I am Sork 'Tasuvai. Light of Sanghelios. Protector of the Prophets. Betrayed by Pity and the geth and marked as a traitor. My only purpose now is to expose Pity of his corruption and end his life personally. Was that the answer you sought?"

The Spec Op was silent as he gazed upon the ground, methodically listened to Sork's every word. There was a moment of humility as the Elite raised his head, "You are the Light of Sanghelios. Protector of the Prophets. And my father. Commander Raja was right, you would never have lifted your blade against Pity without a good reason."

"Father? You have a son?"

Sork moved closer to the Spec Op as he responded to Shepard, "I have sired many children, as is my right and duty as a swordsman, to spread my skills to a new generation." Sork placed his hand on the Spec Op's shoulder, "He is the most promising fighter of all of my children I have seen so far."

The Spec Op crossed his arm over his chest, "You honor me with your words, Light of Sanghelios." The Spec Op donned his helm once more, "Light of Sanghelios, I must ask. The human, the demon, are you?"

"No. I do not work with them. The one who saved my life," Sork stepped aside as he showed Tali to him, "She is the one I follow. Though she has decided to follow the humans."

The tusks from the other Elite's helmet came rather close to Tali's mask as he carefully studied her. "This one must be a great warrior despite her looks."

"She is skilled with technology. Her people are masters of this technology. Along with Quen's arrogance, she managed to save me."

As the two Elites continued to converse, Six signaled to Lamenting

Light to return to the Mako and wait for their return.

* * *

><p>Without someone to aid him, Cortez found a piece of wire that he used to pick his shackles unlock. Cortez watched as colonists were carrying strange pod like objects and placing them throughout the colony. Cortez and O'Brien continued to exchange info by tapping on the walls using ODSF codes, an altered variation of Morse code.<p>

"So when do we escape?"

"Apparently Cortez thinks we should wait for Six and the others to return. He's hoping Mr. Brightlight had some useful info to alert the others aboutâ€|something, I don't know."

Ashley leaned against the wall looking toward the door, "Great. Just great. Placing our lives in an AI'sâ€|handsâ€|" feeling redundant as Lamenting Light had no hands to speak of.

"Come on, that thing has been rather helpful."

"To you maybe. That thing looks at any of us and I swear, it wouldn't lift a circuit to help if anyone else was dying."

O'Brien sat up from listening to the wall, "Look Ashley, as long as me, Cortez or Six are around we'll order it to help. Besides, pompous bastards like it are the only really pain about our jobs."

"Yeah. Bureaucracy and all of that crap huh. I'll hold you to your word O'Brien."

"Say, Chief. Ifâ€|when we get out of this mess, will you think about accompanying me up to the mess on the _Normandy_?"

Ashley smiled at O'Brien, "Sure, why not. Soon after I knock some sense into these colonists."

"Don't leave me out on that action."

* * *

><p>With Sork's son's aid, the team decimated the group of geth guarding the shielded path and fought alongside them to slaughter a group of krogan guarding computers where Gavin Hossle's work station happened to be. Sork's star child has even aided with clearing a group of geth next to another claw.<p>

Tali scanned the claw with her omni-tool as Six continued to remain behind the two Elites. "Same as before. We don't have the ordnance to blow this claw. Let's keep looking."

"When the geth docked with this structure, I witnessed one of the claws not cause damage. It might have entered a window or opening we may exploit."

"Excellent observation, Vaht. We may be able to exploit that oversight."

"We may yet do something even better, if you're willing."

* * *

><p>As the geth destroyer patrolled the area the other geth continued to monitor power flow and the plans for the next assault on Zhu's Hope. The destroyer's sensors detected two heat signatures that matched Sangheili body heat and stealth technology. The first figure decloaked to reveal he was sub-commander Vaht as he moved to one of the monitors. "I have come to ensure your position is not capture by the humans."<p>

The destroyer turned its head, following the second heat signature as it started to make the stuttering noise as it pointed.

"What do you blathering about? I came alone." The destroyer pulled its weapon out before a Covenant Energy Sword activated. The blade stabbed through the destroyer before it could even pull the trigger. Vaht pulled out a Plasma Rifle screaming, "The enemy is here! Prepare for combat!"

The geth all turned on the destroyer as they tried to shot the unseen target. The geth hopper started to jump around as it tried to get a better position. As it stopped to target on the wall shots were fired on it. The hopper turned its head just as its kinetic barriers were overloaded and a single slug broke through the eye.

"The humans! You three! Deal with them. The traitor is mine." Vaht turned invisible to engage as the three geth moved to the walkway to find the humans, with the last geth working its way around the destroyer's body to attack the heretic Sangheili. The destroyer was being supported by a green energy beam that was hanging on one of the support structures above.

Reaching the top of the catwalk, the geth didn't find anyone. Instead they triggered an Overload tech mine alongside a cryo grenade that just froze them in place. The human, Commander Shepard, along with a female quarian used their shotguns and shattered the three geth to pieces. The last geth turned its rifle on the two ready to fire. Instead, a Covenant Energy Sword found its way through the back of the platform as a powerful force swiftly threw it to the ground and crushed the head before it could look back.

* * *

><p>Vaht lifted his boot as he scrapped the white goo off on the floor, "Disgusting machines."<p>

Six watched from the catwalk as Shepard and Tali moved to the new area. "This is interesting, Shepard. A containment lab of some kind."

She looked at the third claw, "Now all we have to do is find something here that will break through that armor plating."

Vaht walked away from the claws, "I watched a human attempt to use those controls before my men slayed him," noted by the blood stains on the floor and wall. "A means of destroying the geth may be through that."

Tali started to examine the console as the others joined her, Six continuing to keep her distance from the two Elites now. Tali understood the consoles now. They controlled a nearby stone shutter that the geth ship happened to have one of their claws lodged into. With enough PSI the shutter should be capable of searing the claw off. With a quick mathematical calculation, the shutter was activated with thirty-three PSI. The five of them watched as the stone slammed onto the arm, slowly grinding against the metal claw before the pressure was too much for it. The claw's integrity finally gave way to the shutter and crushed it.

They now watched as the other claw started to have a hard time supporting the vessel without the third claw, just as Lamenting Light predicted. The tower started to shake as the ship's claws desperately tried to compensate for the shift in weight distribution. It was the geth preciseness that now led to the ship's undoing. The two claws were ripped out of the tower as the dropship, now powerless after experiencing the power cut, fell to its destruction.

"Very good! The field barring the exit will be down. Now we can go deal with the Flood." Tali let her hate toward the geth out, "I hope that ship was full of those geth bastards!"

Vaht gripped his fist, "Our caution proved great today, the geth have failed their assignment and we will return victorious."

Before any more could be commented, Shepard's comm finally picked up a signal. "_I repeat, Normandy to shore party. Are you reading? Anyone there? Normandy to shore party. Come on, Commander, talk to me!_"

Shepard quickly responded to the hail, "Is that you, Joker? What's going on over there?"

The pilot reported, "_We're in lockdown here, Commander. Something happened to the colonists. They're banging on the hull, trying to claw their way inside the ship. They're freaking out! We haven't been able to get a hold of Ashley, Cortez or O'Brien either!_ Something weird is going down and >were caught in the middle!_"

Shepard turned to Six, who was gripping her rifle tightly. Shepard placed her finger against her ear, "They can't do any real damage. We're on our way back. And we'll find them. Just hold your position."

Joker was still nervous with all of the banging going on, "_Uhâ€|yeah. Okay. Well, we'll just wait right here for you, Commander._"

With that the comm. shut off. Shepard turned to his crew, "This place will be crawling with geth in a minute. Keep together and we'll get out of here in one piece."

Sork placed his hand on his son's shoulder, "Vaht, return to your men. Return to the fleet. Claim to have never encountered us and having finished your mission before we arrived. Help Raja and Rayta find evidence to expose Pity's corruption."

Vaht lowered his head as his right arm crossed his chest, "As you

say, Light of Sanghelios." Sork released his hold allowing Vaht to disappear and return to the dropship that awaited him.

Six started walking back to the stairway, leaving the others as she spoke to Sork, "Now who's the one being 'too charitable', Elite?"

* * *

><p>AN: **Oh, hello Reclaimers and humans alike. I must apologize for my odd behavior before, and for overriding controls of this one over his annotations. It has been so long since I have interacted with others who were not machines. However, my interactions with the Reclaimers as of late have not been as I initially expected. Now I have interlopers who have muffled history for religious gain. I must correct their errors. But how? The Reclaimers have a plan, I've seen them speaking to one another, though it seems the other humans are not truly affiliated with them. I must find my own answers it seems. Maybe the Sork interloper will be of use to me after all.

24. Chapter 24

**A/N: **Little over halfway done with Feros colony now.

* * *

><p>The team returned to where the barrier was once erected. Now Lizbeth was awaiting their return. "There you are! We should get out of here. I don't think this place is safe."<p>

Sork stomped his foot at her, "You lied to us, human!"

Tali grabbed Sork's arm and pulled him back so Shepard could speak to her. "I need some answers. You knew more about the Thorian than you let on."

Lizbeth took a step back but she wasn't going to back away. "Iâ€I was afraid. I wanted to stop the tests, but they threatened me, told me I'd be next. When the geth attacked, I stayed behind to send a message to Colonial Affairs. I tried to tell them where to find the Thorian, but the power cut before I could send the message. Iâ€I never meant for this to happen."

There was sincerity in Lizbeth's words, unlike before. Though she was still trying to help them, something Shepard could appreciate, "You did what you could. I'll help them if you can tell me where to find the Thorian."

Lizbeth agreed to Shepard's terms. "The Thorian is underneath Zhu's Hope, but the entrance is blocked. The colonists covered it with the freighter just before the geth attacked."

Shepard thought out loud about how everything works together, "But why are the geth after the Thorian? What could Saren want with it?"

Lizbeth didn't know who Saren was but she did know about the Thorian. "Well, it does have unique mind-control capabilities. That's what ExoGeni was interested in."

Before Shepard could ask Lizbeth another question, Shepard's comm buzzed to life, "_Normandy to shore party. Come in._"

Shepard pressed the earpiece and responded, "What is it, Joker?"

"_We're getting a lot of geth comm. chatter. Looks like they're headed your way._"

"Thanks for the heads-up, Joker." Shepard looked to the other as he said, "You heard the man; let's move out."

Lizbeth stepped into Shepard's path while avoiding Sork. "I'm coming with you. I might be able to help. Undo the mess I helped create."

"Wait." Six grabbed Lizbeth's arm to stop her. With her stopped, Six rushed to the Mako first, climbing into the tank to speak with their other passenger. "Light?"

"Ah Reclaimer, you won't believe what I managed toâ€¦"

"Light," Six interrupted by grabbing the monitor, "We have an ExoGeni survivor coming with us. I need you to stay out of sight until she leaves the vehicle. Understood?"

Light immediately responded as it slipped out of Six's hand, "Most certainly, Reclaimer. I will remain hidden until a designated time of which you deem acceptable."

* * *

><p>Vaht returned to find his men had packed everything away and were just waiting for him. "Sub-Commander Vaht, was your mission successful?"<p>

Vaht passed the Sangheili, "A false alarm. The geth misidentified it. The humans and their turian allies have been eliminated."

"Sub-Commander, our sensors detect an unidentified vehicle moving across the skyway, leaving the tower. What are your orders?"

Vaht looked at the sensor for a moment. He turned away as he entered the Phantom, "The geth have their mission to deal with the Thorian and any who would stand in their way. Our mission has been completed. We are returning to the Fleet."

Some of the other Sangheili however weren't as pleased with such a notion, "Sub-Commander, we cannot let a single one of these vermin live. So long as these heretics draw breathe our missionâ€¦"

"Is superseded by our mission to secure and retrieve holy relics of the Great Journey. Or have you forgotten our role within the Covenant? Fleet Master Rayta's has even ordered our return the moment we had secured the holy relic. My sidetrack to deal with humans the geth could not break those orders. Now, if any of you wish to remain with the geth and deal with the Thorian, be my guest. But we are leaving with or without you."

The Uggnoy more than willingly complied, strapping themselves in as the remaining Skirmishers awaited the Sangheili to board. The Sangheili who were arguing with Vaht now entered the ship as Vaht himself was waiting for them. With everyone on the ship, they left the planet without a second look back.

* * *

><p>Cortez was taking this moment to meditate, something he hadn't been able to do for some time since he's been on board the Normandy. O'Brien though seemed to always find the time to break it, though unlike many times before this was important. Cortez was being told to look out the window.

Looking out the window, Cortez witnessed the colonists had gathered the body of the colonist that had greeted them was stripped of his clothing as the colonists started to spread a massive amount of spores on him. As they did, the spores entered the body and a transformation started to occur. The body lost its pigmentation as the eyes were covered over. His fingers became elongated forming into claws. With the transformation complete, the body raised, glaring over to Ashley and Cortez.

Ashley pulled back away from the window, both in shock and horror. O'Brien continued to play that he was unconscious around the colonists, so he had to stay away from the windows, "What? What's going on?"

"The colonistsâ€|they were changing one of their own into some kind ofâ€|monster."

Cortez went into more details for O'Brien, informing him that the body was the man killed when they first arrived and that the changed body was being placed inside the pods they've watched be carried away. "Oh God! Doâ€|do you think they plan to do that to us?"

"I don't know, but I won't let them do that to me without a fight."

* * *

><p>Clearing a group of heavy geth units with the Mako, including two armatures, Shepard and company pushed on into the tower the ExoGeni personnel were held up in. As the tank turned to go down the ramp, Tali picked up a faint transmission, "â€|anybody. Is there anyone picking this up?"

"_Get away from that radio._" The first voice was clearly a woman's as the one belonged to a man.

Lizbeth, uncomfortably wedged between Sork and Six, heard part of it, though it was braking up badly. "What was that all about?"

Tali was able to strengthen the signal as transmission picked up again, "_â€|this is Juliana Baynham of Feros colony. Please help usâ€|_"

Lizbeth shot out of her seat, "That's my mom. Stop. Stop the rover." The Mako had arrived to the small hold they were held up in. Lizbeth

quickly ran down the small ramp on her own, though Six wasn't planning to leave her.

Shepard, Tali and Sork followed the two as they kept to the shadows. Six took position behind a crate as did Lizbeth. Shepard and Tali were next to Six as Sork used his camouflage technology to hide.

* * *

><p>A scene unfolded, Juliana and Jeong were in the middle of an argument, drawing the attention of the other employees. "You can't do this, Jeong!"<p>

Jeong was flustered, passing around as he was ready to pull out what remained of his hair. "Everyone shut up! Let me think!"

Despite all of this, Juliana continued to fight back, yelling at Jeong, "You won't get away with this."

Jeong threw his arm as one of the security personnel quietly came behind Juliana, "Get her out of here!" The man grabbed Juliana by her arms as he attempted to restrain her.

"Get away from her, you son of a bitch!"

The voice came from the entrance, causing a distraction that allowed Juliana to break free, "Lizbeth!" rushing off to her.

Jeong however spotted someone attempting to hide again, "Damn it! Come out where I can see you! All of you!" Two figures begrudgingly walked forward, coming out into the light. Now with a clear view and confirmation, Jeong let out a sigh of anguish, "Hah, Shepard. Damn it! I knew it was too much to hope the geth would kill you. I found some interesting facts about you in the ExoGeni database. I know what you did during the Blitz, but your heroics aren't needed here."

Shepard was trying to be the diplomat here, "We can talk this out. Nobody needs to get hurt."

Jeong seemed more paranoid now as he corrected her, "You don't understand. It's not that easy. Communications are back up. ExoGeni wants this place purged."

Lizbeth was disgusted, "This is a human colony, Jeong. You can't just re-purpose us."

"It's not just you. There's something here far more valuable than a few colonists," Jeong didn't care, or rather he cared more about his career with ExoGeni to argue otherwise.

Shepard was blunt about it this time, "Are you going to tell them about the Thorian, or should I?"

Juliana was in the dark about the creature, turning to her daughter, "The what?"

Lizbeth explained to her mother as short as possible, "It's a telepathic life-form living under Zhu's Hope. It's taking control of the colonists there. ExoGeni knew all along."

Juliana repeated herself as she turned back to Jeong, "You won't get away with this, Jeong."

Jeong was overconfident that nothing could happen to him, "So you keep saying. But nobody's going to miss a few colonists."

Shepard shifted herself slightly to her right, "You want to bet on that, Jeong?"

"Yeah? It's just you four. Everyone else here will follow my orders."

"I think you need to recount." Shepard then pointed her thumb behind her, not even looking back, "I have one of the deadliest sharpshooters I've ever met with your head in her scoop. I've never seen her miss her target." Jeong looked past the Commander and spotted Shepard's missing companion, the woman with the elongated helmet. Somehow she managed to silently perching her rifle onto the crate looking straight back at him through the barrel. "Then there's the Elite hiding here that won't hesitate to gut you like the worm you are." Suddenly the two of the guards near the entrance were lifted a meter into the air by their throats before being flung across the area, one crashing into another security guard as the other landed and destroyed a pill of crates. Suddenly to Jeong's left a pronged energy activated in a similar form to a mass relay. There was a strange distortion they became more visible now thanks to the strange weapon before the form revealed itself. A hulking being, comparatively, with four mandibles around his mouth wearing white armor with orange spikes covering him, alluding to his size. His right eye was scared, burned by something and his armor showed signs of many battles. The strange alien snarled at Jeong as he positioned himself between Jeong and the Commander's group, dragging the mass relay looking weapon on the ground as it easily cut through the tough stone as if it was butter.

Lizbeth, with the two strangers ready to kill, poked at him. "Still think you can get away with this, Jeong?"

Jeong dropped the pistol he had, taking a few steps back as the 'Elite' took a large step forward, "Look, even if I wanted to, I couldn't stop it. ExoGeni will send more assayers. They'll know what happened."

Shepard didn't see a problem, "Tell them the geth destroyed the Thorian."

"Yeah," though Jeong then thought of another problem with the plan, "but the infected colonists can't be here when the company men come."

Juliana quickly stopped such a notion, "You can't just kill the colonists. It's not their fault."

Having studied it for some time now, Lizbeth gave a suggestion, "If you kill only the Thorian, it might be enough to stop the infection. Maybe."

"It's worth a try but I don't know if I can avoid harming the colonists," thinking they might try to fight to defend the

Thorian.

Lizbeth was out of ideas. "There has to be another way."

"Maybe there is." Juliana had a sudden brainstorm, "I think there's a way to avoid killing the colonists."

Jeong, fearful of the two rather imposing killers, walked away as he reminded them, "Just make sure there's no evidence when you're done."

With the nuisance gone, Six and Sork returned to Shepard's side. "What did you have in mind?"

Juliana pulled out a vial, "I think you could safely use a nerve agent to neutralize the colonists."

Lizbeth understood her mother's plan now, "Like a gas grenade!"

"Releasing clouds of nerve gas doesn't seem like a particularly good idea," speaking for her and Sork's safety.

Juliana explained further, "It's not like its weapons-grade. The insecticide we use in the gro-labs contains trace amounts of Tetraclopine, a neuromuscular degenerator. If their nervous systems are already weakened, it may act as a paralyzing agent."

Six took the vial, "If need be, I'll get close and detonate them."

Juliana was glad, "Excellent. Thank you so much. We'll stay out of your way until you clear a path. Good luck."

* * *

><p>Back at Zhu's Hope, Ashley continued to watch as more of the strange pods were being dragged out and placed around the area. "So how are out there now?"<p>

"At least a dozen. But I saw them take several more to somewhere else."

"Damn it! If only we could warn the others about those things." O'Brien banged his head against the wall, "They might already know about what's going on, but I doubt they'll be expecting those things."

"Or maybe we canâ€¦" Ashley walked away from the window and activated the terminal still in the room.

"So how's going on the extranet going to help?"

"It won't. But If I can find the right frequency, I might be able to send a message to Joker, or Shepard herself and warn them."

"Nice. So you actually know how to do that?"

"Nope. Kinda wish Tali was here right now. I'm sure she'd be able to do something."

"Really?" O'Brien got up from the bed, "I'd rather not put an innocent looking girl like her through crap like this. How 'bout that turian, Garrus. He seems pretty handy with an omni-tool. Plus he's seen worse so this wouldn't affect him as much, psychologically speaking."

Ashley had a smile on her face as she was thinking about it now too, "Hey, what about me?"

"You? You're tough as grit! Hell you remind me of my old drill sergeant who'd put the boot to me every chance she got. She's nowhere near as hot as you though."

"Nice save. Now let's just hope that this message can save the others."

* * *

><p>The Mako made quick work of another group of geth that attempted to halt their advance toward Zhu's Hope. Arriving at the garage door to the elevator, two familiar figures were waiting for them with a strange pod next to the controls. It was the ODS'Ts, O'Brien and Cortez.<p>

With the Mako stopped, Six quickly jumped out of the tank. She approached the two rather quickly. Suddenly without a cause, Six grabbed Cortez and O'Brien by their heads and rammed them together. Shepard drew her pistol on Six, "What the hell are you doing? They're your friends!"

"No, they weren't." Six pulled the helmet off of one revealing it to be one of the colonists. "They weren't transmitting a signal that my suit recognized. That means they've been captured."

Lamenting Light hovered over and started to examine the unconscious men. "Remember Reclaimer, the Thorian spore require more time to infect their host. Their natural immune systems should be capable of fighting off most of the infestation at this very early stage."

With Sork and Tali now out of the Mako, the pod started to open. As it opened, a grey humanoid form curled in the fetal position was revealed. Slowly, the being stood up, turning its attention toward the closest individual, Tali. With a raspy howl the thing ran at her with elongated claws ready to strike. Tali grabbed for her shotgun, but the creature moved rather quickly. Fortunately for her Sork kicked the monster back against the garage door. But it didn't seem to feel it, any of it. The creature pulled itself back up as it wanted to charge at someone again.

Six tried firing on the thing with her M392 but the shots seemed to go through it like a water balloon. Lamenting Light's sensor detected something that peeked his interests again. Light scanned the creature before Shepard used her shotgun to blast it. Oddly the creature exploded into a mass of green goo that covered a small area.

Sork had used himself as a shield to cover Tali from the goo as he now attempted to remove it from himself. Tali though, was a bit shaken by the creature, "That thing was not one of the colonists. No amount of infection could have done that."

"I have to disagree with your assessment of the situation." Light continued his examination of the goo that now covered the ground. "Given my analysis, I have to say that this creature is the very same colonist that was killed by the dock. The similarities between the Flood and Thorian creature is now in perspective. Intense and strenuous genetic alterations to exploit this natural augmentation process are what connect the two species. If we can comprehend and prevent this process with this Thorian we may be able to synthesis an actual cure for the Flood!"

"Focus you!" Shepard snapped at the monitor. "We're here to help the colonists and remove the Thorian. Hopefully these gas grenades will do the trick."

"And probably more of those creatures await you," Lamenting Light warned as he continued his examination of the goo, "ExoGeni records indicated that Zhu's Hope had over seventy colonists prior to the geth attack, not including the salarian merchant and the crew that ferried him here."

* * *

><p>AN: **Sorry to cut it just before the fun. Now about the Creepers, I think this is the best answer we're going to get about how the creepers are created(at least for me). And I think if the creepers were in a pod before they emerged, sorta to give it a bit of a mystery to this first encounter and some defense to give them time to emerge.

25. Chapter 25

**A/N: **Long wait I know, had to fit everything together just right.

* * *

><p>Having moved the two colonists in O'Brien and Cortez's armor away from the garage door Sork stood next to the controls for the door. Lamenting Light has also moved for the time being to allow the others to operate without worrying about it causing any trouble. Shepard signaled Sork to activate the door. As the door rose the entire garage floor was littered with several more pods. Once in view, the colonists immediately opened fire on the Mako. Sork attempted to use his stealth tech to plant the gas grenade near the colonists but the pods opened as he passed them, causing the colonists to wildly fire in his direction. Six grabbed another gas grenade from the Commander and rushed into the garage.<p>

A few of the colonists started firing on Six, but her energy shield easily took the shots. With a clear line of sight, Six tossed the grenade, bouncing it to the group's feet. Six ran down the incline, signaling Shepard to detonate the grenades now. Sork released his hold of the explosive device before he jumped over the creatures as they attempted to grab him. The grenades detonated and knocked out the colonists. What wasn't expected was the effect the gas would have against the creatures. All of the creatures that came in contact with the gas lost their structural integrity before become a pool of green goo. Sork easily dealt with the last two with swift slices of his

energy sword.

"Is this enough material for you to work with, Oracle?"

Lamenting Light started scanning the goo and what remained of the fleshy membrane. "I believe so. Oh, Commander. If I could trouble you, I would like to also examine the neural agent. It seems very efficient at disassembling these infected creatures. I only need a small sample, not an entire grenade even." Shepard pulled out a grenade to which Light quickly grabbed it and syphoned a small amount of the gas before handed the grenade back. "Thank you."

Six returned from outside dragging the two colonists who were in the ODS armor. She wasn't planning on leaving the armors and weapons behind, nor was she willing to accept the possibility that the two of them were dead, not unless she saw their bodies herself. With everyone set, Tali activated the elevator as it rose back up.

* * *

><p>The door to the room opened as one of the colonists came to give them food. Cortez ignored her as she left the room. Cortez quietly moved to the door and used the food tray to keep the door slightly ajar. After confirming the door to the exterior closed, Cortez forced his door open. The colonists left him his undersuit but he had created a makeshift pick from the few pieces of wire he could find.<p>

Cortez was trying to pick Ashley and O'Brien's door quietly as he continued to look for any of the colonists who might be checking in on them. About a minute of carefully prying open the wall panel and rewiring a few of the circuits before the door unlocked. "Alright you two, ready for some action?"

"You bet."

"Just tell us when we get some payback."

Cortez stopped O'Brien and Williams from charging though, "Hold on you two. Can't you hear the gunshots?" They silenced themselves as they listened to find at least two weapons were firing at something. The shots were echoed a bit so they had to be some distance away from the colony. "We just have to wait for the right time now."

O'Brien walked over to the exit, "And when will that be?"

"I think when all of the gunshots start around the ship. Come on, I want that door unlocked beforehand."

* * *

><p>Sork knocked the final Thorian creature to the ground before stomping down on its head. Six was now next to the hall just before the stairs to the colony and two of the colonists entrenched behind the cinder block. The two colonists were firing down the hall with a frenzy of bullets. Judging by the spread of the shots and rate of fire, Six determined that they were using pistols. With a gas grenade in hand, Six used her hardened uplink remote sensor camera attached to her helmet to survey the area without exposing herself to the colonists. Ready, she tossed the grenade down, bouncing it against

the floor and deflecting it off rail guard. Two seconds after seeing the grenade bounced a second time she detonated it.

Shepard and Sork moved up as more pods opened and more of those creatures started to rush toward them. The two retreated back to the top of the stairs as the creatures blindly rushed toward them into the barrel of Shepard's shotgun and Sork's energy sword.

The two easily dispatched with the group clearing the way for Six and another grenade. Arcelia and three other colonists were defending the entrance behind a barrier and another block of cement. Six switched the grenade's settings so the wings would activate and fly straight out. She tossed the grenade out as all four colonists were firing at the doorway. As the grenade flew toward them Six leaned out of cover to watch and time the detonation. Six detonated the gas grenade when all four colonists were peeking out of cover and within the gas' blast radius.

Six returned to the upper level just for the two colonists wearing the ODS armor. She threw one over her shoulder while dragging the other by his arm down the stairs.

While Six was bringing the two unconscious bodies down, Shepard pushed forward. The doors to the merchant ship Borealis had been locked down. Sork jumped onto the small walkway and stomped one of the pods before it could bloom.

He quickly moved behind one of the pillars in the area as the salarian Ledra and another colonist started firing on him. Shepard grabbed her last grenade and lobbed it at them as it rolled to a stop just past the second pillar. The gas quickly released, knocking the two out. Tali found a small crate with five more grenades that Shepard quickly added the gas into the new grenades. Six rejoined Shepard as she used her M392 to scout the area next to the crashed freighter.

"Ten pods, five colonists in crossfire positions."

Shepard remembered walking through the colony, the area was open with several positions the colonists could use to flank them. "Six, I want you to cause the pods to open up. After a few of them start opening, fall back to this walkway and out of view of the colonists. That's when we use the grenades to knock the remaining colonists out."

"Yes ma'am." Six waited for Shepard and the others to get into position. Once ready, Six swapped her M392 for her M6G magnum pistol. Six quickly ran into the middle of the pods, staying long enough for the pods to start opening. The colonists came out of cover and started firing on Six. Her energy shield was able to take the shots from the pistols but she fired off a few warning rounds hitting the crates and various other objects they were using for cover.

Six knocked one of the Thorian's mutated humans back with a blow from her left elbow before she retreated as planned. Six jumped over Shepard, who was crouching with her shotgun aiming down the narrow walkway with Tali on her left and Sork with a plasma rifle to Shepard's right. Six had time to turn around and take aim down the path though she didn't have long to wait as the first of them arrived. In stride, the four of them fired on the creatures. Six and Shepard would fall the first as Sork and Tali coordinated and killed

the next. Back and forth between them it continued until there were no more.

Sork holstered his weapon. "Give me the grenades. I will plant them near the humans."

Shepard grabbed three and placed them into Sork's hand, "Just try not doing anything heroic."

"Heroism is not what compels me," his body disappeared and he was off. Silent, the Elite quickly found where the humans were hiding. He activated a grenade and rolled it toward a female behind a small crate next to the ship. The second one was placed between the larger crate and cover beside the console Hana Murakami was working on earlier. Sork fell back now, returning the last grenade back to Shepard. "They should all be within the blast radii."

The two grenades detonated and was able to knock out the remaining colonists. Now that the area was safe, they gathered to the console as Tali got to work raising the mid-section of the ship. Sork looked down the flight of stairs as Tali was locking the console so they weren't trapped down there. Shepard heard a faint trail of foot steps behind her, drawing her pistol, she finds Six with her DMR already targeting something. It was Fai Dan, he was staggering toward them. "I tried to fight it, but it gets in your head. You can't imagine the pain. I was supposed to be a leader. These people trusted me." Fai Dan's arm grabbed the pistol he had as he forced his arm up to aim at them. "It wants me to stop youâ€|but Iâ€|"

Six lowered her rifle as she spotted a familiar face walk up behind Fai Dan, "I think it's time you said good night." O'Brien grabbed Fai Dan's right arm, pointing the pistol to the ground before Ashley used a metal pipe to knock him unconscious.

Ashley, Cortez and O'Brien were stripped down to their undersuits. "So, did you miss us?"

"Cortez. O'Brien. I brought your armor back." Six pointed beyond the ship.

Ashley walked past Sork, who remained near the stairway. "Commander. I'm sorry we were capture."

"You couldn't have known about it Chief. Light did say warning you guys might have endangered your lives and the colonists. I'm actually glad we took its advice."

"Yes ma'am. So what the plan now?"

Shepard watched O'Brien and Cortez walk around the pathway to where Six left the two colonists, "You and Tali are heading back to the _Normandy_. Six and I will deal with the Thorian."

Sork turned around, "If you are hunting the enemy of the Forerunners, I shall also accompany you. A means to help atone for sins past, both personal and for my species."

"Whoa there," O'Brien rushed over half-finished putting his armor back on, "you're not actually thinking of going down there with him are you? Close quarters, nowhere to really go."

"That's why I'm going too." Cortez walked past O'Brien, fully outfitted in his armor again. "No offense O'Brien, but your better with range."

"Uh no offense Cortez, but what about weapons? You don't have any!"

Cortez walked over to the large crate near them, unlatching the hooks and throwing the lid off. "I spotted them place our weapons in here while they were putting our armor on." Cortez grabbed his weapons, tossing an MA37 assault rifle to Six.

Six walked over to the crate now, sifting through the weapons, "Williams, I'm barrowing your shotgun. Is that alright?"

"I guess, if I'm still not going."

Shepard looked to the crate, "How fast do you think you can gear up?"

Williams quickly went over to the crate, "Give me five and I'll be set."

"You have three. This thing knows we're coming so now I'm thinking it's going to be desperate."

* * *

><p>With Tali gone, Sork had no real reason to save or help any of the humans as they plunged deeper into the Thorian's nest. O'Brien had also left, leaving Six, Cortez, Ashley and Shepard to finish this. "Following these roots should lead us straight toâ€|toâ€|" Everyone was speechless as they gazed upon the mass of tendrils and form that was the Thorian. The tendrils all amassed from a single bulbous point as more tentacle-like appendages covered its 'belly' and various parts of its pulsated. There was something of a face near the ledge they were at. A thicker, darker group of tendrils were coming out of a section that had spines, almost like a mouth really.<p>

"What the hell?"

"We're gonna need bigger guns."

As Shepard moved closer to examine the Thorian, the Thorian started drooling. The body started convulse, to which Six and Sork reacted by turning their weapon on it. The tentacles around the 'face' opened to reveal a true mouth before closing around it again. Within a moment a body dropped down, fully clothed in combat armor. The figure quickly stood up and was revealed to be a green-skinned asari with dark facial markings around her eyes. "Invaders! Your every step is a transgression. A thousand feelers appraise you as meat, good only to dig or decompose. I speak for the Old Growth, as I did for Saren. You are within and before the Thorian. It commands that you be in awe!"

Sork and Six now turned their aim to the green asari as Shepard spoke to her, "You gave something to Saren. Something we need."

"Saren sought knowledge of those who are gone. The Old Growth listened to flesh for the first time in the Long Cycle. Trades were made. Then cold ones began killing the flesh that would tend the next cycle. Flesh fairly given! The Old Growth sees the air you push as lies! It will listen no more!"

Shepard wasn't really in a negotiating mood with the Thorian, "I won't let you keep your thralls. Release them. Now!"

"No more will the Thorian listen to those that scurry. Your lives are short, but have gone on too long. Your blood will feed the ground and the new growth!" displaying her biotics as she pushed back Shepard, Sork and Six. Williams quickly pull out her shotgun and blasted the asari off the ledge.

Two pods nearby opened up as the mutated humans stood up. Cortez started firing an MA37 assault rifle at the closet one until it popped. Six recovered from the hit and started to unleash with her MA37 too. The two UNSC members quickly reloaded as a door opened with more pods starting to open as well. Recovered as well, Sork drew out his energy sword and plasma rifle, activating the sword as he let out a roar of anger. He started firing on the new group of the Thorian's creatures while closing the gap. In a fit of rage, Sork bashed one of their heads against the wall with the overheated plasma rifle before he started cutting down the others around him in an elegant display of swordsmanship.

In the flurry of slices, the energy sword cut into the tendril's neural nod attached to the wall of the room. The Thorian let out a roar of pain as the pod burst open. "It weakness has been revealed. Now it shall die!"

"Sork, wait!" Unfortunately the Light of Sanghelios had no intention of slowing down as he ran up the stairway on his own. The others were now just trying to catch up with the warrior as he rampaged through the Thorian's guardians.

As they moved up, the Thorian itself conceived another green-skinned asari out to stop them. Sork was undeterred by the number of pods in the next area as they started open up around him. Sork did not heed them, or he would crush them under foot before it could open. He had his target and nothing was going to stop him. At the next tentacle, the horde was already awake and ready to defend it with their lives.

Six started firing on the group while Sork rushed in. The Elite knocked a few down to reach the tentacle and slice open the node. Once he did though the creatures around him expired. "Commander, the creatures around the pod are sensitive to the destruction of the nodes."

"Just wait up for the rest of us now!"

"No time, he's moving up again."

The green asari was waiting for them however, firing another biotic attack through the door. Sork barely dodged the attack before he moved on her. The green asari grabbed a shotgun and attacked the Elite. His energy shield withstood the blast, though barely. He grabbed the unusual asari by her throat before he threw her at the

Thorian itself while Six dealt with the three mutated creatures on her own.

Just as Sork destroyed another neural node a rather familiar voice started to echo out. "At last, the Gravemind is found."

Cortez looked up above the Thorian and spotted Lamenting Light as it hovered closer to it. "Light! Destroy it!"

"Gladly Reclaimer." Lamenting Light then floated over to the arms attached to the Thorian as it started to use its laser to sever the tendrils at the source. A number of tendrils shot out from the walls around the monitor in an attempt to stop it. Shepard and the others were able to keep the tentacles at bay while Lamenting Light finished cutting through the other tendrils.

With another tendril cut, the Thorian could no longer support its massive girth. The creature let out a fearful scream before it fell to its own demise. Cortez turned back as the monitor was now floating nearby, "Light? What are you doing here?"

"After my excruciating study of the samples, I come to the unfortunate truth that there is no cure. Once infection has taken root there is little beyond Nano surgery that can remove the spores. I'm afraid that also mean there is no means of curing the Flood. I may be able to compose a type of repellent that should disinterest the Flood, for a time. It seems the Precursors never wanted anyone to ever create a means of curing the Flood, not even themselves."

Sork and Six returned to the others and as they were getting ready to return to Zhu's Hope, one of the larger pods on the wall started to show signs of movement. Six, Cortez and Sork were ready for whatever was to emerge. Finally revealed it was an asari, a regular blue-skinned asari who had the same facial markings and armor as the one the Thorian created. The asari was disoriented for a moment but she soon recovered, "I'm free! Iâ€¦I suppose I should thank you for releasing me." The asari, unfazed by the three weapons aimed at her, recognized one of them, "Youâ€¦you are the Sangheili the Covenant wants dead. The Light of Sanghelios?"

Sork had no intension of lowering his weapon, "And you are one of the disciples to Saren's mistress."

Shepard was hesitant to trust the asari, especially when Sork seems to recognize her. Shepard ensuring Six and Cortez still had her in their sights, "How did you end up inside thatâ€¦thing?"

"My name is Shiala. I serve," she paused to correct herself, "I served Matriarch Benezia. When she allied herself with Saren so did I. Benezia foresaw the influence Saren would have. She joined him to guide him down a gentler path. But Saren is compelling. Benezia lost her way."

"Are you saying Saren can control minds?"

Shiala looked out to the pit that once held the Thorian, "Benezia underestimated Saren. As I did. We came to believe in his cause and his goals. The strength of his influence is troubling."

Williams wasn't impressed, "She tried to manipulate Saren. But in the

end, her plan backfired."

Shepard also expressed her skepticism, "Asari Matriarchs are among the most intelligent and powerful beings in the galaxy. How could one fall under Saren's control?"

Shiala clarified, "Saren has a vessel. An enormous warship unlike anything I've ever seen. He calls it Sovereign. It can dominate the minds of his followers. They become indoctrinated to Saren's will. The process is subtle. It can take days, weeks. But in the end, it is absolute. I was a willing slave when Saren brought me to this world. He needed my biotic abilities to communicate with the Thorian, to learn its secrets. Saren offered me in trade. I was sacrificed to secure an alliance between Saren and the Thorian."

Shepard scoffed, "Saren's pretty quick to betray his own people."

"He was quick to betray the Thorian, too," Shiala added, "After he had what he wanted, he ordered the geth to destroy all evidence of its existence. Saren knows you are searching for the Conduit. He knows you are following his steps. He attacked the Thorian so you could not gain the Cipher."

Cortez quickly jumped into the conversation, "What's the Cipher? And why did Saren need it?"

"The beacon on Eden Prime gave the Commander visions. But the visions are unclear, confusing. They were meant for a Prothean mind. To truly comprehend them, you must think like a Prothean. You must understand their culture, their history, their very existence. The Thorian was here long before the Protheans built this city. It watched and studied them. When they died, it consumed them. They became a part of it."

Cortez was rather skeptical about the idea, "So the Thorian taught Saren to think like a Prothean? How?"

"The Cipher is the very essence of being a Prothean. It cannot be described or explained. It would be like describing color to a creature without eyes. To understand, Shepard must have access to endemic ancestral memory. A viewpoint spanning thousands of Prothean generations. I sensed this ancestral memory—the Cipher—when I melded with the Thorian. Our identities merged, our minds intertwined. Such knowledge cannot be taught; it simply exists."

"We need that knowledge to stop Saren!"

"There is a way. I can transfer the knowledge from my mind to yours, as I did with Saren. Try to relax, Commander." Six stepped forward between Shepard and Shiala. "I'm sorry, all I'm trying to do is give the Commander the Cipher."

"Right initiative. Wrong person. I'm the one with the visions."

"You? But Saren thought it was Shepard who interacted with the beacon."

"Saren's been misinformed than. Continue the process."

Shiala nodded, "Rightâ€¦" She moved closer to Six now, "Calm your mind. Slow, deep breaths. Let go of your physical shell. Reach out to grasp the threads that bind us, one to another. Every action sends ripples across the galaxy. Every idea must touch another mind to live. Each emotion must mark another's spirit. We are all connected. Every living being united in a single, glorious existence. Embrace eternity!" Shiala's eyes turned black as the visions from the beacon started to replay in Six's mind. The images and sounds were clearer than when it first hit her. She watched as humanoids were being decimated by orbital bombardment, flesh and metal fused as one. What felt like minutes was actually a few seconds as Six recovered from the ordeal. Shiala stepped back, "I have given you the Cipher, just as it was given to Saren. The ancestral memories of the Protheans are a part of you now."

"Six, are you alright?"

Six stepped back to lean against a nearby wall, "I'll be fine, Cortez. Iâ€¦I just need time to recover."

Shiala agreed with her assessment, "You have been given a great gift; the experience of an entire people. It will take time for your mind to process this information."

Ash could still see Six was a bit unstable, "You look a little queasy. We should get you back to the ship."

Shiala bowed to Six, "I am sorry if you have suffered, but there was no other way. You needed the Cipher. In time, it will help you understand the vision from the beacon."

Sork pushed his way forward, putting the plasma rifle to Shiala's chest, "Now that you have given us what we need, tell me more about the_ Sovereign_. And this claim that it controls minds."

"I understand your concern, Light of Sanghelios. Many of your leaders have entered _Sovereign_ at least once. Tours in an attempt to gain their trust. It is through these tours and their time onboard that Saren hopes to eventually dominate them, indoctrinate them. However, I have heard Saren say that your people are more disciplined than he had originally anticipated. But if Saren could persuade them to spend enough time within _Sovereign_, even they may not be able to resist it."

Sork seemed ready to end Shiala's life at the moment, "Then I must hurry and find something to prove my innocence." Sork holstered the weapon onto his thigh, walking though the group, "This one is now your problem, humans."

"We can't spend any more time here. Not while Saren's still out looking for the Conduit."

Shiala stopped Shepard from leaving too quickly, "Then I wish good fortune upon you. Saren must be stopped before he finds the Conduit. As for me, I will stay here with the colonists. I feel great shame for my part in their suffering. As long as any of the colonists remain on this world, I will do whatever I can to aid and protect them."

* * *

><p>AN: **A bit longer than my average(word count wise), but I couldn't just stop in the middle of killing the Thorian now could I. Next, I'm thinking about hitting BDtS.

26. Chapter 26

**A/N: **Man I hate having to deal with so much all at once. Four stories that are rattling up here, a few scene in particular keep surfacing, school and all of the new games I plan to buy.

* * *

><p>With everything on Feros behind them now, Shepard and the team gathered to discuss their next move. However, Six was still rather distraught by her recent experience. Cortez grabbed her before she collapsed onto one of the chairs, "Six? Are you sure you're alright?"<p>

"What the hell did that asari do to you?"

Six's hand was pressing against her helmet, fighting through the pain as she normally fought through pain, by trying to ignore it. "I'm fine, O'Brien. I just need a bit more time to rest, that's all."

"Sixâ€|I might be able to help you. I am an expert on the Protheans. If I join my consciousness to yours maybe we can make some sense of it."

"I said I'll be fineâ€|"

Shepard on the other hand disagreed, "The sooner we find something to give us a lead on Saren's plans, the sooner we can catch him. Times already running out on us, Six. Please."

Six wasn't exactly thrilled about having Shiala put the Cipher into her mind, nor did she want Liara messing with her with anything either. Finding her footing again, Cortez released her as she walked into the center of the room as Liara also got up to meet her. "Relax, Six." The hardened warrior lowered her head slightly, though she still towered over Liara by roughly a foot. Liara closed her eye for a moment before they opened and were jet black and shouting, just as Shiala, "Embrace eternity!" Six's mind flashed through the images once again, but unlike when Shiala forced the vision to resurface, Liara was sifting through it. As she did though, Dot was also doing her own analysis of the vision with the Cipher.

After the experience, Liara and Six both seemed rather exhausted. O'Brien and Cortez moved to aid Six as Shepard and Garrus helped Liara. "Six! Six, are you alright?"

"Liara? What just happened?"

The doctor wearily got back to her feet, "That was incredible! All this time. All my research. Yet I never dreamedâ€| I'm sorry. The images were so vivid. I never imagined the experience would be soâ€| intense. You are remarkably strong-willed, Six. What you've been

through, what you've seen, would have destroyed a lesser mind."

"Come on. Get to the point. What did you see?" Ash impatiently shouted.

"The beacon on Eden Prime must have been badly damaged. Large parts of the vision are missing. The data transferred into her mind is incomplete."

Cortez could feel her discomfort as he supported her. "You sure you didn't come across any kind of clue or hint? Something she might have missed or overlooked?"

"Everything I saw you already know. She was right about the Reapers. The Protoheans were destroyed by a race of sentient machines. I think it's obvious there's a connection between the Reapers, the Protohean extinction, and the Conduit. But something was missing. Saren must have the missing information. Maybe he found another beacon." Before Liara let her excitement get the better of her, she turned to Six, though she seemed troubled. "I did however sense another presence within her mind. Something else was also watching the vision as I went through it. Something unnatural."

This also concerned many of the crew, with Kaidan being the one to voice the question, "How is that possible? It should only be Six in there, right?"

Cortez and O'Brien turned to each other, uncertain about what they could, or should say. Six pulled herself up and stood on her own two feet. "That's because there is another."

"Six?"

"It's alright. I think they deserve to know by now." Six could see the confusion on all but Sork's face. Six grabbed a chip from the back of her helmet and showed it to the crew, "I have an UNSC artificial intelligence program that I've had to house within my suit and my brain. Her name is Auntie Dot, or Dot. She was the one who gave us the initial Covenant language data. She also helped me make sense of the vision when it first came to me." Six then reinserted the chip back into her helmet.

"An AI? You're letting an AI interface with your mind?" There was concern on everyone's face, none more so than Tali, if they could see past her mask.

"Why not just put your head in front of a geth's rifle, save them the trouble?"

Six looked to Ashley, "She'll never betray us. Her program is specifically designed to help humans however she can."

"That is correct." Six had finally allowed Dot to speak around the crew. "As Noble Six stated Gunnery Chief, my only purpose is to assist with logistical combat data and to provide any other tactically relevant information regarding high value targets, secondary and primary objectives. My only concerns are the safety of the Lieutenant, Master Sergeant, and Lance Corporal. Noble Six has requested my parameters extend beyond UNSC personal to include

members of the Systems Alliance military and the nonhuman crew members of the _SSV Normandy_."

"Is that supposed to comfort us or something? Cause it's not working."

Cortez stood next to Six, "Yeah it is, turian. Dot saved our lives a few times on Reach. She'll always have our back. You can either accept that or try to ignore her. I personally don't care what you do as long as Dot or Six aren't harmed."

Lamenting Light on the other hand was sputtering about Six as he did a few more scans of her armor, "How interesting. You humans were always so creative, even before the activation of the halo array. I hadn't thought your kind would ever consider interfacing with an AI on such a level. Perhaps I may be able toâ€¦"

O'Brien stepped between Six and Light now, "Hey, back off flashlight. And don't even think about doing anything like that with me. Dot's a special case."

"Of course it is," Sork shouted, "It is one of the factors that slowed the destruction of their latest world. Its tactical evaluation and data mapping has proven itself against the Covenant. It may prove to be an asset for later engagements, if given the opportunity to assist." Everyone was rather surprised to hear Sork give support to them, especially about an AI.

"Wow. I don't know if we should be taking that as a complement or be slightly frightened about it."

Cortez looked to Shepard, "It's your call, Commander. What's going to happen now?"

Shepard turned to Six and Liara. "First off, Dr. Chakwas should take a look at you two. And I'll speak with you three about this later. We're done here. Dismissed."

* * *

><p>After another chat with the Citadel Council, Shepard decided to speak with Kaidan and Dr. Chakwas about Six. Alenko was busy working on one of the sleeper pods, of which he stopped when he noticed her approach. "Anything you need, Commander?"<p>

"What are your thoughts on Six now after that reveal?"

"Yeah, that AI wasn't really something I was expecting to hear. But I guess we can't exactly blame her either. She comes from a different military structure, an alternate universe, remember? To her and the others that AI is like Avina or the Normandy's computer is to us. That AI, what did she call it again, Dot? It seems way too placid to be an AI, at least compared to the tales of rouge AIs revolting against organics."

"So just human nature in the end, huh?"

Alenko laugh a little at that small inside joke. "Yeah, I guess so. So what are your plans? I mean, what's going to happen to them now?"

Shepard turned back, looking as some of the crew were sitting down to a meal, "Well, they have proven themselves and saved our lives a few times. I'm not entirely sure just yet."

"If it ever comes down to a vote, I guess you have my support in keeping them. I think Ash would miss O'Brien more than she'd ever admit."

"Noted, Lieutenant. Carry on."

"Aye, aye Commander."

Shepard walked into the medbay to which Chakwas stood up to greet her. "Hello Commander, is there something you need?"

"Just wanted to check in and see how Liara and Six were feeling."

Chakwas happened to have the results from both of them in hand. "Liara will be fine. She just needs some rest to recover from the melding. The human subconscious naturally resists the asari melding process. I could only imagine the barriers she must have had to go through with Six."

"What do you mean doctor?"

Chakwas handed a chat of Six's new physiological scans. "She has been through extensive genetic augmentations at a very young age. Beyond that though, she's naturally stubborn."

Shepard read through the reports and saw what she was talking about. "Why didn't you notice them when we first took her aboard back on Eden Prime?"

"It's possible that the AI used her armor to suppress them from our scans before we removed her from it, or possibly it could have been cause by the beacon. Honestly I couldn't say with absolute certainty. But what I do know is that with these modifications she'd probably be able to stand up to a krogan toe-to-toe, and win."

"So how was Six after the experience?"

"She didn't seem too fazed. I'm guessing that AI has gotten her used to someone looking through her mind already."

"Was the AI any trouble?"

Chakwas smiled, "Actually it was rather courteous. It even suggested a few possible medications to help her overcome an influx in her acidic levels it detected in her stomach. Six declined but I thought it rather unusual for it to be so concerned with her health. Though I guess I shouldn't be surprised given that it's a military unit."

* * *

><p>After a few minutes to herself, Shepard wanted to speak with Six privately in her cabin. "Six, why didn't you tell us you had an AI with you, especially one you have in your head?"<p>

Six was fully aware of the implications this may lead to. She has seen the disgruntled looks from some of the crew already. "I only worked with Dot for over a month while we lost a colony, Reach. She has aided me in every engagement with the Covenant. After helping secure the final ship for departure, I fought my way through roughly three hundred Elites and Grunts. I was saved by an ONI official who used a prototype weapon that he developed. We had one last transport and I was the only one qualified to fly it. I was also charged with ensuring Dot, and all of the data she has access to, did not fall into the hands of the Covenant. Should I fail, they would have found and attacked Earth. When we arrived to this universe, my only concern has been the safety of the others, and Dot. I failed Duvall and Roger on Eden Prime. But I still have O'Brien, Cortez and Dot. I will not fail them, Commander. I don't care what the _Normandy_'s crew thinks about me."

"I guess I understand where you're coming from. You've been used to working with AI before and they haven't shown any reason for you not to trust them. And our reaction to Lamenting Light didn't really help either. Are you sure you can keep, Dot, in line."

"Lieutenant Commander," Dot's voice was now speaking through Six's speakers, "I can assure you, my only purpose is to ensure the completion of any mission we partake in and the survival of as many humans as possible. My programming also prohibits me from lying."

"You really trust her?"

"With my life, ma'am. The other oneâ€¦" Six's turned her head slightly to the ground.

"Right, Light. You have any feelings about it?"

"With respect ma'am, I don't believe it can be fully trusted with anything. It has proven itself by aid us time after time, but I don't feel like we can allow it into any of _Normandy_'s systems. Light comes from a completely different time and species."

"Even though it holds you, Cortez and O'Brien in the highest of regards?"

"Yes ma'am, regardless of its view of us. Are we done ma'am?"

"Not quiet." Shepard moved closer to Six, "There's more to why you want to keep everyone safe. You're a hell of a fighter but you often run off on your own like a lone wolf. What happened? And why does Dot call you 'Noble Six'?"

Six turned away, "I've normally operated alone ma'am. But I'd rather not talk about. At least, not yet. I'm sorry ma'am."

"I understand. Just remember, the doors are always open if you ever want to talk with someone in private."

"I will. Thank you, ma'am."

* * *

><p>Down in the garage O'Brien was trying to talk with Ashley about

what just happened in the briefing room. "Come on, can you really blame me for not telling you earlier? I mean opening up and saying 'hey we've got an AI with us, it's in her head' doesn't exactly come off as sane here." She continued to ignore him as she was cleaning the weapons. "Come on Chief, you think the Alliance would want Garrus or Wrex poking their claws through the ship's systems? I was just kinda hoping we never had to worry about bringing her up. Look if it makes you feel any better, we can sayâ€|"<p>

"Enough O'Brien." Cortez grabbed onto his shoulder. "If she wants to talk to you, she will. I really don't think ticking off the one person who is with all of the weapons right now is a good idea."

Even the young quarian was having her own difficulty with accepting this new presence. Sork could see her venting her frustrations on the drive core in her attempts to deal with the news. "Why must you worry yourself so much about this?"

"She has an AI with her! Not only is it with her, she has it in her head! How can you not view this as a problem? Even you said your 'religion' said that AI's are bad."

"And before my talks with the Oracle I would have cut her head off the moment she revealed the AI, fled back to the Fleet using both her death and the AI she carried as an offering to return to my station so that I could exact my revenge against Pity. The humans protect their AI's and their data with their lives to prevent the Covenant from obtaining the locations of their worlds. Without their AIs, or their demons and imps, they would have been exterminated by my people cycles ago."

Tali turned to face Sork, "You can really accept that she's had that thing with her this whole time?"

"Had she revealed it earlier, it would have only complicated our situation further. The crew would never have trusted them, I would have attempted to kill them at every turn available, and you might have tried to terminate it. Tell me, truthfully, before she revealed her AI, would you have trusted those three with your life."

"Before they told us about itâ€|" Tali had to think about it now, but reflecting back on the missions they've been on, they've done nothing but to ensure everyone's survival. "I suppose, but we can't justâ€|"

"Then nothing has changed," Sork interrupted. "Time after time on the few planets I've fought on with them, they risk their lives so you and others on this ship did not have to. They will fight to stop the geth. They will fight to stop Saren. Nothing has changed. Only the acknowledgement that the demon's hacking abilities are attributed to the AI and a new resource to call upon while fighting."

* * *

><p>Having returned to Unending Resolve, Sub-Commander Vaht 'Komtaree and two of his men presented the artifact to the Prophet of Pity, "As you foretold, we have found an artifact of the gods." One of the honor guards grabbed the sphere to hand off to Pity.

"Excellent work. You have done well today." As the three were about to leave, Pity stopped them, "Oh, sub-commander, about your work with the geth on that planet?"

"I attempted to help fortify their position but there were factors I could not anticipate for. My priority was to return the artifact to you. I could not risk the demon or anyone else taking it from me. The geth failed to eliminate the Thorian where as we achieved our task."

"Is that so?" One of Pity's new geth honor guards walked over, "Because the geth seem to remember it slightly differently."

"I swear upon you, my prophet. My only concur is the success of our mission. I would never endanger that because of myâ€¦personal feelings about the geth. You have my word."

Pity smirked, "Very well. So long as you remember who's side you fight for. You are dismissed, sub-commander."

Outside of the Pity's audience chamber, Commander Raja was waiting for the trio. "Vaht, how did your meeting go with Pity?"

"It was fairly intimidating now that he has allowed geth onboard our ships. I fear for our place in the Great Journey."

Raja placed his arm on his sub-commander's shoulder, "I promised him I'd watch over your progress as a warrior. I won't let Pity's gamble with the geth interfere with our destiny." Raja started walking away from the others while avoiding any of the geth that might be in the area, "So, how was he faring?"

"Very well. He hasn't lost his combat capabilities, despite the hindrances. He did remove a portion of his helmetâ€¦"

"For better combat efficiency I would assume. Is that all?"

Vaht shook his head, "There is more, but it is not something I would speak of with unwanted ears listening."

"Wise." Raja tilted his head slightly up to which Vaht finally noticed the geth hoppers following them. "We will continue this discussion at another time."

* * *

><p>Before Shepard could speak with Cortez and O'Brien about Dot, Joker informed her of an urgent message coming from Admiral Hackett. Shepard walked up to the CIC as the Admiral started speaking, "Commander, there's an urgent matter I want you to look into as quickly as possible. Recently the colony of Terra Nova has sent a civilian engineering team to an asteroid to convert it into an orbital station. The asteroid has been dubbed X57 and has been moved into Terra Nova's orbit. However recently all communication with the engineers has seceded and sensors from Terra Nova have detected the fusion torches on X57 have been reignited. It may be nothing Commander, but after the geth attack on Eden Prime I'd rather not taking any unnecessary risks with Terra Nova."

"Are we sure it's not simply a mechanical malfunction that they're trying to fix?"

"_Not likely. The team has been reporting regularly up until the fusion torches reignited. I have a bad feeling about this, Commander. I need a team that can get onto the asteroid fast and without being detected just to be safe._"

"We'll get on it right away, Admiral."

"_Good to hear. Hackett out._"

* * *

><p>AN: **Now that Dot is known by the crew, can she really be an asset they can use or will fear keep her use limited? I guess the team will find out on astaroid X57.

27. Chapter 27

**A/N: **Sorry about the delay folks, some random dude got antsy at me for using a name for a Sith Lord he 'claimed' to have rights on, or something, and uses in a costuming group he's apart of(I swear the crazies out there). I've been on fire control trying to stop him from trying to involve Lucasfilm Limited and trying to sue me for, as he claimed, infringement. Hopefully with that behind me I should be back in the swing of things and update sooner.

* * *

><p>Shepard and a team were already strapped into the Mako as the Normandy flew toward X57 to prepare for the drop. The Normandy's computers scanned the asteroid and reported, "_Status: Sensors reveal three fusion torches propelling Asteroid X57. At its current rate of acceleration, the asteroid will collide with Terra Nova in approximately four hours. Analysis: Torches must be disabled to cease the acceleration._"

As the Mako was about to be dropped they picked up a weak transmission from the asteroid from a woman, "_Hello? Hello? I heard your transmission. Can you hear me? They haven't found me yet, but I can't talk long. Please. Shut down the fusion torches or we're all going to die. God, I hope you're hearing this._"

After touching down on the asteroid's surface, Shepard turned back to Six, "So, does your friend have any suggestions on what to do now?"

"On our approach, I detected a malfunction in a nearby transmission tower. Once repaired, it should provide coordinates for all stations that are not already mapped on X57. Marking the tower's position now." Shepard looked at the coordinates Dot had displayed and found the tower was on an elevated location north-east of their current position.

Once they reached the tower Six left the Mako to insert Dot into the transmission tower. While she inserted Dot into the transmitter, Garrus turned to O'Brien, "So how fast can that AI work?"

Soon after the question was proposed, the rapidly spinning transmitter finally started to slow down until it was properly sending and receiving signals. "That fast enough for ya?"

Dot's image flashed on the console for Six to pull her out. "Coordinates received. There are three survey stations, three stations controlling the fusion torches, a makeshift radio station, the main facility and a construction camp. Updating your map with the coordinates."

Six linked her suit's computer up to the Mako as the new coordinates were now displayed. Shepard was studying the map and the different coordinates. "We have less than thirty minutes to stop the torches!" Shepard turned back to the flaming wreckage behind them off in the distance. "Six load up. We're moving on."

With Six back in, the Mako turned around and moved to investigate the burning vehicle. It was a M29B Grizzly. At the site though was a body. From the scorching they could tell he managed to escape the vehicle only to be gunned down soon after. Shepard turned the Mako around again, heading back toward the drop zone to the survey station.

When they got to the station, they found another victim. His body showed signs of a beating before he was executed with a single shot through the back of his helmet. Records from within the station identified him as Engineer G. Mendel and he was waiting for someone named Slajs to take his place, assumedly the body they found next to the M29B.

With that out of the way they moved to the closest fusion torch to shut it down. As they did they picked up that transmission for the same woman, "_You're headed in the right direction. I don't know who you are, but I'mâ€"Damn it! Got to go._"

On their approach though, sensors ID'ed several hostile units surrounding the station. From what they could see, it seems that whoever reignited the fusion torches also reprogrammed the automated defense grid, including the turrets that were protected until they started to attack.

* * *

><p>Within the Normandy, Cortez found Sork reviewing the asteroid and its current trajectory toward the planet on the CIC. "Remind you of anything?"

"No. Whoever has done this is a coward. The planet serves no strategic purpose or value other than its farmlands."

"That didn't stop you or the Covenant from glassing most of our worlds."

Sork lowered his head in shame, not looking back to Cortez. "At the time, we believed that we were cleansing your filth from the galaxy. I hold no delusion about my actions, but the past cannot be changed. I now have many questions for the Prophet beyond his betrayal, and I will see to it that they are all answered before his death."

Cortez wasn't expecting the Elite to be so calm about having had a

hand in the total destruction of hundreds of worlds, trillions of humans, but he did understand that there is no point in attempting to make amends at the moment. He turned his attention back to the overhead map of the asteroid as the Mako finished traveling in an unusual pattern within a small region.

* * *

><p>Avoiding the rockets, all defense turrets were destroyed and the team moved into the station. The lights had been dimmed, but there was enough that they could distinguish objects. As Shepard opened the door they found three humanoids in combat armor with weapons around a mangled corpse as two varren tore into it. When the door opened, it caught the attention of the varren as they alerted their masters. When the two closest turned to face the team, they were completely visible to them. The similarities between them and humans ended with their physical build. Their faces looked squashed up with multiple nostrils and four eyes. Their heads had no visible hair on them, though the various ridges on their heads made it difficult to distinguish. They weren't exactly excited to see them as Shepard scoffed, "Batarians."<p>

One of the batarians shouted, "Harak. Chekt! Chekt!" It seemed to be a command as the two varren ran toward them with their maws ready to bite. Six killed the closest one with two shots, both through its left eye. O'Brien killed the second with the 99D sniper rifle already in hand. The shot went clean through the varren, ricocheting off the floor and skimming the fuel tank in back. Garrus saw an opportunity, he tossed an overload tech mine as he readied his sniper rifle. The tech mine stripped the two batarians of their shielding and Garrus took the shot. The resulting explosion from the fuel tank burnt the two batarians to a crisp as another pair of varren came around the corner.

Shepard move on to deal with the batarian that broke off as Six and O'Brien dealt with the varren. Shepard found two more batarians waiting for them as she signaled them of the threat. Six got the message as she grabbed her combat knife and waited for O'Brien and Garrus to ready their sniper rifles. Ready, Six ran out into the opening to draw them out. The batarians took the bait as they tried to shot at her. O'Brien and Garrus found their marks and both brought their targets down with a single shot. Shepard though found the batarian she was trailing as he popped off a few rounds at the Spartan. With his focus on Six, who was running toward him now, he failed to notice Shepard before she pulled the trigger on her shotgun. The barrel was too close for his kinetic barriers to stop them or the shredder rounds.

Dot's scans of the building indicated that the controls for the fusion torch was on the upper level. Once found Garrus quickly hacked the system and shut down the torch. Before he locked down the console a voice came through, "_I'm readying that the torch is offline. Was that you? Can you hear me?_"

Garrus moved aside to allow Shepard to respond, "I hear you. What's going on? Who are you?"

"_My name's Kate Bowman. I'm an engineer. I was part of the team assigned to bring this asteroid to Terra Nova. We were attacked yesterday by batarian extremists. I've been hiding since they

arrived. I think they know the torch went out._"

"Why are they doing this?"

"_I don't know. But if this asteroid isn't slowed, millions of people on Terra Nova are going to die. If I find out anything I'llâ€"_ Kate stopped for a second, "_I've got to go. Good luck._"

With nothing left, Shepard and the team returned to the Mako. Before they could leave however they found the door in the main floor closed. Shepard found a man in an Elkoss Combine Light Assassin Armor nervously holding a pistol. "Hey."

The man pointed toward Shepard and fired. "Oh, god!" finally realizing she was human. As the bullet hit her shield, the man holstered the pistol, "I didn't mean toâ€|are you hurt?"

"Takes more than that one shot to bring me down."

"Unless it's a sniperâ€|" O'Brien muttered to Six.

"Sorry. I didn't even realize you were human untilâ€|well. Guess I'm not much of a soldier."

Shepard could only image what he's been through. "I know you're scared. But I'm here to help. Commander Shepard, with the Alliance."

"Simon. Simon Atwell. I'm the chief engineer on this rock. Listenâ€"we don't have much time. The batarians fired up the fusion torches. You've got to shut them down before we hit Terra Nova! There are four million people down there, Shepard. Iâ€"my family. They live in Aronas. My kids and grandkids. Nice community. Good schoolsâ€|"

"Look, Simon," O'Brien wrapping his arm around him, "For those of us who don't have the time to do the math in their heads, what kind of damage are we talking about, if this rock makes it planet side."

Simon thought for a moment, "X57 is 22 kilometers long. Twice the size of the asteroid that wiped out the Earth's dinosaurs. It would be like millions of fusion bombs striking at once. Millions. The heat of the blastâ€|a thousand kilometers away, clothes will ignite. There'll be global wildfires. Air shock will flatten everything for hundreds of kilometers. Terra Nova will die, Shepard. Not just our colonyâ€"the planet. There'll be a climate shift. Mass extinctions. The ecosystem won't recover for thousands of years. Millions, maybe."

"Uhâ€|what if we could redirect it to the ocean? Should we not be able to retake X57 in time."

Simon had an even more horrified face on now than when O'Brien first asked him, "That would be even worse! Tsunamis would sweep inland at hundreds of kilometers per hour. Millions of tons of water would be vaporized at the point of impact. Global cloud coverage. The plants could all die. And if they go, the whole ecosystem rolls over. Iâ€"I'd have to run the numbers, but take my word for it: it'd be bad."

Shepard still didn't like this situation, having held out on her own for a time during the Skyllian Blitz. "This doesn't make any sense. Batarians run criminal gangs. Unethical, but profitable. They don't destroy worlds. What does this gain them?"

Simon moved O'Brien's arm off himself, "I've heard all the stories. Slave rings ranching people like animals. Pirate bands burning colonies to the ground. But this isâ€¦ The Citadel Conventions forbid asteroid drops. I never thought the batarians would go this far."

Six moved past the group, returning to the Mako alone. Not without leaving a parting message, "These batarians are terrorists. They'll be dealt with as such and stopped."

* * *

><p>With Rayta and the other Sangheili leaders gathered in his personal quarters, away from the prying eyes and ears of the geth, Vaht detailed his encounter with his blood-father. They however weren't exactly thrilled about some of the details revealed to them. "So he is betrayed by Pity, and he thinks it's alright to smolder his honor like this?"<p>

Sanj'ik quickly yelled at Horona, "You think him a fool? Like he said, he does not follow the humans, he follows the one who saved his life. It just happened to be working with the humans. His concern is the wellbeing of his charge, and if that means working with a demon, then so be it. His honor will be regained. I'm sure he's dying to carve his blade into the demon's mask."

"Or he plans to use it." Raja started to display a number of deceased Prophets, "Demons, even the imps, are known to slay Prophets occasionally. So if the Light of Sanghelios kills the one who slayed Pity, he could regain his status among us."

Vaht however couldn't agree with his assessment. "I'm not as convinced, Commander. There was animosity, but I fear it may have been due to my presence mostly."

"Do you really feel there is more than what you saw?"

"I do not know, Fleet Master. He did however request that I help you find evidence of corruption from Pity."

Rayta was more concerned about the team Saren had requested to aid Matriarch Benezia in her endeavor on the frozen world of Noveria. "So long as more of our brothers do not have to die needlessly by his blade. Our time is up. Any longer, Pity and the geth may find this suspicious. We shall convene again. May the favor of the gods watch us all."

* * *

><p>With warning of the impromptu minefield, Shepard and the team left Simon to check out another survey station and the radio station. At the survey station they found the body of Dr. Hymes and her final recording before the breach charge killed her. At the radio station, Dot advised reactivating the radio station in order to help disrupt

the signals as a means of potentially hiding Kate Bowman's transmissions. Dot noted that it may also have the adverse effect of alerting the batarians to her presence instead.<p>

Shepard decided to forgo reactivating the station in favor of having Garrus and O'Brien set up their sniper rifles on the high rise around the second fusion torch to destroy the turrets while she and Six activated them. As the Mako drove closer to the minefield, O'Brien was lining up his shot while talking to Garrus, "So turian, hope your aim is as good as you claim."

"How about we make a friendly wager? Whoever gets the most turrets destroyed cleans the other's armor for a week."

"You're on scale face. Hope you like washing the crap off my boots."

Garrus fired off a round. "Sorry, what was that? I was busy getting my first kill."

* * *

><p>After O'Brien and Garrus destroyed the first turret, Shepard and Six moved into the minefield. As they did their suits computers monitored their proximity to the blast caps and their sensitivity to their movements. Six however saw another threat coming their way. "Commander, get down!"<p>

The two moved behind the destroyed turret as gunfire and rockets started flying their way. "Batarians are stepping up their defenses." Shepard grabbed her sniper rifle as Six was readying her M392 DMR. With an opening presented to the duo, Six started to draw the batarians out and weakened their shields. The first one didn't know what happened as his shield flickered for a moment before the sniper round penetrated his helmet's visor and through an eye. A second sniper round was fired soon after, with the bullet penetrating a batarian's armor and through his heart. Six returned to cover to find that O'Brien and Garrus had moved positions to help out with O'Brien's sniper rifle still steaming from the round just fired.

The two remaining batarians however moved behind nearby crates that wouldn't break from sustained fire. Six grabbed her combat knife and kukri before radioing O'Brien, "Keep those two pinned."

Without waiting to explain, Six slid down the hill as she had Dot display the exact locations of the blast caps on her HUD. "Six, wait!" She didn't adhere to Shepard's cry as she burst into a sprint and ran toward the two batarians. "Damn it. Garrus, covering fire." With three snipers keeping the batarians down, Six managed to escape the mine field and quietly crept up to the first batarian.

With the three snipers as a cover for her approach, Six was inches away from the batarian who was waiting for an opening between the three shooters. Without giving him a chance, Six swung the kukri into the batarian's visor as she dug it into his skull. The batarian wildly screamed in horror for the few seconds before the void of space sucked all of the air out of him and his suit. Six left the batarian where he fell as she circled around the crate waiting for the other batarian to check things out. Six waited as the batarian leaned down and grabbed the kukri out of his dead comrade. In that

moment Six cut the batarian's air hoses, letting him suffocate as he desperately attempted to reattach the hoses before all of the oxygen left him. After seeing the batarian finally stop moving, Six retrieved the kukri and moved to deactivate the blast caps. Dot made short work of the controls and signaled to Six when she finished. "Blast caps deactivated. We may proceed with the mission."

Shepard drove the Mako back to O'Brien and Garrus before driving down to the torch control station where Six was waiting for them. Shepard hopped out of the Mako first, irritated, "Six, I told you to wait. Why didn't you listen?"

Six turned toward the door, "We have a planet to save with less than twelve minutes to do it. We don't have time to waste with these batarians." Even with the difference in situations, Six was flashing back to Operation: UPPER CUT, and the sacrifice made by the closest friend she had made in years.

"Better get going, Six, they're gonna need you down there. Listen, Reach has been good to me. Time has come to return the favor. Don't deny me this. Tell 'em to make it count."

"Jorge"|I failed to protect Reach for you. I won't fail another colony again. I won't!"

* * *

><p>AN: **Insubordination? But they aren't apart of the same military. Will Six's lone wolf attitude affect the mission even further? Possibly.

28. Chapter 28

**A/N: **Well I just jumped into the deep end, four stories I'm going to try write simultaneously. Don't expect a predictable update timetable. Oo my schedule will be chaotic"| well more chaotic then usual.

* * *

><p>On route to Noveria, a team of Sangheili warriors along with a small group of Unggoy were assigned to Matriarch Benezia to ensure she acquired coordinates for a lost mass relay. Benezia was dressed in an elegant black gown with a rather exposed cleavage and an equally elaborate headdress that covered her scalp crests. As her commandos were crating several of the geth, Benezia spoke with the lead Sangheili. "Remember, no one is to know of your existence. Once we leave the main port and reach Peak 15, we will secure the facility and contain the situation."<p>

"Evading security will be of little difficulty for my warriors."

"Security is far more elevated compared to the Citadel. Lifeform detectors, weapon and element zero scanners. Your stealth technology won't be sufficient this time."

"We just need you to keep their sensors occupied long enough for us to reach the planet." The Sangheili walked toward where his men were

loading their weapons and themselves into one-man orbital insertion pods as the Unggoy, in groups of four, packed themselves into heavy orbital insertion pods and one was packed with three krogans. "We will see you and the others on the ground." The warrior strapped himself into a pod, crossing his arms over his chest before the hatch sealed him inside like a sarcophagus.

The _CPV_-class heavy destroyer that was transporting them maintained a safe distance from Noveria and their scanners before five heavy pods and six pods were launched with the intended vector of landing along the mountain pass to the Peak 15 facility in the middle of a snow storm while Matriarch Benezia, her commandos, and the crates of geth, flew directly to Port Hanshan as scheduled.

* * *

><p>Having deactivated two of the fusion torches, Shepard and company were treated to a transmission of the batarians capturing, and possibly executing, of Kate Bowman. With time of the essence, the team quickly moved to the last torch controls before the batarians could send reinforcements. Once inside they found heavy resistance from batarians and their varren war beasts. Despite the numbers they plowed through batarian forces with little difficulty.<p>

Now all Garrus had to do was deactivate the torch and lock the terminal just like the others. While he did that another group of batarians arrived. The leader of the group didn't have his weapon drawn, but the others were as he called out, "Hold it right there. This doesn't have to end in bloodshed." Six and O'Brien kept their weapons ready as Shepard moved toward the batarians, "Don't come any closer. We can do this the hard wayâ€|or we can end this peacefully."

O'Brien wasn't buying any of it. "HA! Like how you 'peacefully' settled things with the engineers here!"

"Hey look, I'm just doing my job here. Hijacking this rock wasn't my idea. I signed on to make a little profit. A quick slave grab. Nothing more."

Shepard took a step forward, knowing Garrus was now in position with his sniper rifle on the lead batarian, "This isn't just a slave grab anymore. Millions of people are going to die."

"Don't you think I know that? I'm just following orders here. If it were up to me, we'd have already left."

"Well, it's not too late. You can still leave."

The lead batarian shook his head, "I don't think so. Balak would skin me alive and sell my hide out of spite. Crazy bastard. This whole mission's gone to hell and I'm gonna pay for it."

"Commanderâ€| "

Shepard whispered to Six, "Trust meâ€|" Shepard could see the batarians weren't really into this operation. "So why do you listen to him?"

"Good question." The batarian looked away for a moment, muttering to himself, "I had a bad feeling about this from the moment we landed," turning his head back to Shepard, "Now Balak wants you dead. And what Balak wants, Balak gets. I can't change that."

"Do you always want to be second in command? Get me out of here and I'll take care of Balak. Then you can start giving the orders."

The batarian thought about it for a moment, "Huh, an interesting proposal. It certainly has benefits over the current situation." He finally turned to his men, "Shut it down. This is Balak's problem now." The other batarians lowered their weapons as the varren handler moved the varren off. As his men started to leave, the batarian turned back to Shepard, "I hope you're as quick with a gun as you are with your promises. For both our sakes."

"Balak will get what's coming to him. And so will you if I ever catch you in human territory again. Are we clear?"

"Perfectly. Balak's holed up in the main facility." The batarian then tossed a keycard to Shepard, "You'll need this to get in. Don't underestimate him. He's a mean bastard." And with that the batarians left.

"_That was a bit risky Shepard._"

"I have three sharpshooters around me, I was in no real danger. Besides, there's already been enough blood shed. I'd like to try and minimize it. Even if they are slaverâ€¦" Six looked and found the disgust in Shepard's eyes before she quickly changed her mood, "Come on, we have one more station to search and then the main facility."

* * *

><p>With the ship docked, Lady Benezia and her commandos were greeted by a number of Elanus Risk Control Services officers. "Welcome to Port Hanshan, Benezia-sama. I hope your business today is very fruitful."<p>

"I'm sure it will be." Benezia's commandos were close behind her as they brought several large, sealed crates with them.

The Elanus Risk Control Services officers moved to scan the crates, as per protocol. However they seemed to be getting some resistance from the asari commandos. "Please miss, we need to scan them."

Benezia looked to the crates as her acolytes prevented them from getting too close. "Is this truly necessary?"

The chief security officer bowed to Benezia, "I'm sorry, Benezia-sama, but we must. It is for everyone's safety." Benezia's act however was working, drawing attention away from the sensors to allow the Covenant forces to breach the atmosphere and begin to secure the facility.

"I have a very tight schedule. I am here representing Saren Arterius in a matter involving Binary Helix that requires my personal attention."

* * *

><p>With the distraction working, Covenant forces were able to land onto the frozen world. All eleven pods safely landed as each one opened to reveal their passengers. Unlike normal operations they were ordered to toss the insertion pods down into the ravine below to conceal their landing. Not long after they were securing the area, a shuttle craft was flying toward them. "Just as she planned. Move it you slug!" The shuttle landed long enough for the teams to get inside while dropping off more crates of geth to establish defense points along the trail, just like the crates left behind within Port Hanshan's garage. Benezia did not believe they would be able to kill the Commander, but they should be able to stall her long enough so she can acquire their real objective, something that wasn't told to the Sangheili, nor does she plan to share.<p>

* * *

><p>Shepard and the team found the fourth engineer, after activating the automated drones left behind, Six found a trail in the dust before finding his body with a sniper round through his visor. The batarians didn't even bother to loot his body after killing him. The main facility was heavily fortified, with several automated turrets waiting for them. But nothing a little patients, and a lot of Mako jumping couldn't fix.<p>

Now Shepard tried the keycard, and to most of their surprise, it worked. Once inside though they spotted a small pool of blood, where the batarians had killed someone. With a disadvantaged point of entry, Shepard and the team established themselves at the base of the stairs while Six drew them into the trap. Six's motion tracker detected five targets, as Six counted another three that weren't moving. Six opened fire on one of the batarians, drawing their attention, then fired on a fusion containment cell, killing the batarian. The second batarian's shield took most of the hit and were down. Six took the shot, killing him with a bullet through one of his eyes. A drone opened fire on her, as a rocket zoomed past her helmet. Six fell back down the staircase, trying to draw the rest of the batarians with her.

She swapped her DMR for the MA37 she was carrying as the others also using their rapid fire weapons, O'Brien using the M7S SMG as Shepard and Garrus were using Ariake Technologies Tsunami. The plan seemed to work too well, as three batarians rushed down the stairs to be caught in the four way crossfire. They weren't even given the chance to fire their weapon as each one dropped dead and slowly slide down the remaining steps.

Six and Garrus moved up, keeping the drones busy while O'Brien and Shepard both moved to the upper level. Garrus broke left as Six covered the right, forcing the two drones to divide. Just as Shepard got to the top of the stairs, a batarian engineer spotted him and tossed a tech mine her way. O'Brien noticed the batarian toss the mine and was able to knock Shepard to the floor before the mine could reach her. "Now we're even." O'Brien now had his sniper rifle and crawled away from the tech mine. The batarian was still waiting for the explosion, not paying attention to O'Brien who now had a clear shot of his head.

With the sniper round bouncing off the ceiling Six evaded a rocket from the drone, rolling into an office as Shepard dealt with the drone. As Six recovered, her motion tracker noticed a group of friendlies confined together. When she investigated Six saw three humans, two women in worker uniforms and a man in armor, possibly the only security personnel left along with a bomb. "Dot, do you think you could do anything to help disarm it?"

"Negative, Noble Six. My databases contain no data on batarian explosive devices. Even had I any data, there is no means for me to interface with it to begin with."

Six noticed that there was no timer or any type of sensor that she could visually discern. "What about the wireless signal? Could we disrupt it?"

"Possibly. Unfortunately your armor does not have the equipment necessary for such performance. My only other recommendation would be to unlock the door, or find the detonator and disable it."

So find the batarian with the trigger. That shouldn't be too hard.
Six kept herself hidden as she moved to the upper level.

* * *

><p>Garrus used O'Brien as a distraction and got two batarians with one sniper round. Shepard was able to shoot down another drone while O'Brien dealt with one of their shock troopers. Eventually the batarians ran out of people to send after them and one of the storage units opened.<p>

A lone batarian was trying to hide inside when Shepard walked in. The batarian, completely scared, dropped his weapon, trying to grab for it again, "Dâ€|dâ€|dâ€|die, human!" Shepard quickly finished him with her shotgun before he could retrieve his weapon.

O'Brien rejoined the others down below as Shepard walked out the container. Out from hiding, a batarian in red armor with a small entourage stood above her on the upper level, "You humans. You're almost more trouble than your worth." Given his demeanor and how high he held himself, Shepard assumed him to be Balak.

Shepard wasn't intimidated as Garrus and O'Brien now flanked her with weapons at the ready, "Let the hostages go and maybe you'll live long enough to explain yourself to the Council."

"I don't answer to the Council! Or to you. I'm leaving this asteroid." Balak pulled out a detonator from his belt, "If you try to stop me, I'll detonate these charges and your helper and her friends are all going to die."

Shepard stood her ground, "You don't get to leave. Not after what you've done."

"What I've done? This is nothing compared to what's been done to the batarians. We've been forced into exile. Forced to survive on what we can scrounge up. It's been like that for decades."

Six however was setting herself up. With her DMR, she was targeting Balak when she contacted Shepard, "_Commander. I have him in my

sights. Permission to engage._"

Shepard turned back toward the hostages as she shifted her sights slightly enough to find Six and signaled her to break off. As to keep Balak from noticing her she questioned him, "Why take it out on these people? They didn't do anything to you or the batarians."

"Didn't do anything?" Balak started to flail his arms, "Aside from colonizing a world that could have been ours? Aside from using resources that should have been ours? We were left to defend ourselves. But the humans were stronger than us. We knew that. The Council knew that. But it didn't matter. It was you. You and your kind are the only reason we're in this position."

O'Brien finally shouted at Balak before Shepard could respond, "So killing innocent people make up for all of that four-eyes?"

Balak quickly shouted back, "We had no other options. Sometimes you need to get someone's attention before they'll listen. That's why we attacked you at Elysium. That's why I'm doing this. You forced our hand!"

Shepard remembered the assault she helped defended against, "You attacked us first. When we retaliated, you ran off to the Council hoping for help. When you didn't get it, you hid. You've got no one to blame but yourselves."

Balak stomped his foot, "Enough! You couldn't possibly understandâ€|Actually, you just don't want to understand. And I'm done wasting my breath." Balak raised the detonator again, "Now, if you want your friends to live, I suggest you step aside."

Shepard was conflicted for a moment, but she knew what she should do as she lowered O'Brien's weapon, "You can go. But this isn't over. I'll find you eventually."

"Maybe. But I made sure you won't follow me today. Those charges are still on a timer. Better hurry if you want to save your friends." Balak and his entourage left but not before they activated more drones to keep Shepard from reaching the explosives in time.

Six watched Balak as he and his people walked around and back toward the entrance. Dot detected one of the bombs that was activated and marked it on Six's HUD. She quickly turned back to start working on the bomb. Dot guided Six through the process of disarming the explosive, the AI also noted that the timer was stopped at two minutes thirty seconds.

Down below as O'Brien and Garrus covered Shepard as she defused a bomb in a small alcove. With the drones still distracted by O'Brien and Garrus, Dot had located the last bomb and Six rushed over to it. O'Brien spotted Six running on the upper level, he redoubled his efforts to draw the drones' attention from Shepard and Six long enough to deactivate the bombs. O'Brien went back to back with Garrus now as the two snipers fought through the drones. "Say Garrus, want to make another bet? Double or nothing on whoever can take out the most drones."

"You really want to clean my armor for two weeks, O'Brien?"

"I don't think so. I've already got five kills on these things!"

Garrus fired another round, almost destroying the drone, "Well don't get your hopes up, I'm about to notch up number seven."

Shepard finished with the bomb and quickly returned to help the duo. "So, did I miss anything?"

O'Brien finished the drone Garrus didn't destroy. "Six is defusing another one as we speak. So how many more to go?"

Shepard drew the attention of a drone that almost targeted Six, "That should be the last one. All we have to do now is destroy the rest and give Six the time she needs to disable the bomb." Six had already started when Shepard said that, though this one was rather difficult. This one took Dot a bit longer than the last, but she was able to guide Six to defuse it just as the other finished the last of the drones.

"Twelve, O'Brien. I want my armor to get some special waxing today."

"Not so fast scales, thirteen confirmed. Looks like I get to see you waxing my armor for a week."

* * *

><p>Balak watched from the shuttle as X57 stabilized its orbit around Terra Nova, "Cursed you, Shepard! I will have my revenge, and reclaim our rightful place in the galaxy." Balak turned to his men, "I want that traitor Charn bound before me so that I can ripe his eyes out!"<p>

"We can't! An unknown source of radiation, similar to a ship exiting FTL, has just spiked in the entire area."

"What?"

"Balak, we have to flee back to the relay beforeâ€|"

Balak pulled the pilot out of his seat, "You'll do no such thing until we find Charn and the other cowards!" Soon however bolts of electricity started to spark before them as a massive electrical sphere emerged before them. Balak released the pilot, throwing him into his seat, "Get us out of the way!"

From out of the sphere a massive ship, roughly 9.3 kilometers long, however it only seemed to be a small portion of the ship's true size as both ends were burned off. Despite the unusual size of the ship and obvious value, Balak didn't have the resources or man power to secure and claim it for the Hegemony. "What are our orders?"

Balak was furious at himself, but he knew he needed to return and report to the Hegemony and evade the humans, for now. Balak however wasn't pleased with the idea in the least, "We're leaving. Get us back to Khar'shan. We'll find Charn later."

* * *

><p>AN: **Noveria, they explain how Benezia and her commandos reach Peak 15, they explain how the geth and rachni infest the areas, but they never explained how they got three krogan into the garage of Peak 15. That always kinda annoyed me. I mean, its not exactly easy to smuggle one of them through a tightly secured location like Noveria(not saying its impossible), or they could be mercs they hired on later(I prefer my explanation). I think we can guess what Balak accidently stumbled uponâ€|

29. Chapter 29

**A/N: **Been trying to get this down just right. I think I got it.

* * *

><p>Reach: August 14, 2552 14:37 Hours

Jorge-052 just tossed Noble Six out of the Covenant SDV-class heavy corvette as the ship was almost docked with the Covenant supercarrier. Jorge walked back to the slipspace drive and placed his hand over the activation switch, "Alright you bastards, let's go find this Great Journey of yours." Jorge waited long enough for Six to be out of the slipspace bomb's blast radius. Jorge closed his eyes as he activated the bomb and in a flash everything went black.

* * *

><p>Terra Nova: July 12, 2183

The _Normandy_ was holding at a safe distance from X57 when the unknown ship appeared just outside of Terra Nova's orbit. "What the hell is that? It's huge!"

The ship was displayed on the CIC for everyone else to see when Cortez spoke out, "That's a small portion of a Covenant Supercarrier."

Kaidan looked to Cortez, "How small of a portion are we talking?"

"A Supercarrier is roughly 29 klicks long. I'd say about a third, give or take."

Lamenting Light however was all abuzz, "I am interested in seeing how you meddlers have used my creators' technology."

"That is missing section of the _Long Night of Solace_, " Sork continued, "I knew Shipmaster Rho 'Barutumee. He was an excellent strategist before his disappearance. We watched as the remains of his ship crashed down onto the planet the humans called Reach, before we glassed it."

Tali had a rather bad feeling about the situation, "But what happened to it?"

Cortez turned to her, "We'd have to ask Dot or Six for details. All I know is that Colonel Holland approved of Operation: UPPER CUT to try and remove the Covenant threat. That was, before the massive fleet arrived soon after."

Sork took a step forward, looking closely at the midsection of the ship. "Tali, enhance this area." The image was expanded to reveal a smaller ship below. "As I thoughtâ€¦| _Ardent Prayer_."

* * *

><p>Shepard noticed Six has been unusual energetic since the arrival of the ship identified as Long Night of Solace by 'Tasuvai. She, along with Six, Cortez and O'Brien were going to the SDV-class heavy corvette identified as _Ardent Prayer_.

As the _Normandy_ got closer to the corvette, Shepard turned to Six, "Do you have something you want to tell us?"

Six looked down, gathering her thoughts before she looked to Shepard, "Operation: UPPER CUT, designed by Noble Two as a means of destroying the Covenant Supercarrier that was devastating our forces on Reach. In lieu of the nukes we didn't have, she devised that we use our equivalent of your drive cores to destroy the ship. We lost a lot of people to get it up thereâ€¦|"

"Noble Two? Who was she?"

"Kat. She was a part of the team I was assigned to. She was theirâ€¦|our tech specialist. She even knew about some of my more classified files. Another point she used to device the plan."

"Is there anyone from your team still in there?"

Six looked off to the distance, uncertain of herself, "Maybeâ€¦|"

* * *

><p>The Normandy was now parallel to Covenant corvette's port, as instructed by Sork 'Tasuvai and Noble Six, before the _Normandy_'s airlock opened. As Shepard, Six, Cortez, and O'Brien floated toward the hangar bay Sork continued to monitor their progress toward _Ardent Prayer_.

Wrex however had other concerns, "This is stupid. We're exposed if either ship decides to attack."

"Your concerns are duly noted, krogan," Sork continued to look over the remains of _Long Night of Solace_, "but as the demon said, she had kill most onboard _Ardent Prayer_, including Shipmaster Ardo 'Moretumee. As for _Long Night of Solace_, they would be a major threat, had they a means to attack."

"What's that supposed to mean, Elite?"

Sork glanced over to Chief Williams for a moment before he returned his glare to the hologram. "_Long Night of Solace_ has two pinch fusion reactors along with several secondary reactors. They have lost one of the primary reactors along with most of their secondary reactors. Rho 'Barutumee would have only had seconds to react when the sensors detected the unknown slipspace drive's activation. Those still within the bridge will have undoubtedly survived, the rest of the ship is questionable. At this point he would focus on recapturing _Ardent Prayer_ and killing any humans onboard."

* * *

><p>Six was leading the team to the corvette's hangar bays. O'Brien caught sight of something rather familiar waiting for them. "God, I've missed those birds."<p>

Six remembered her final battles within before Jorge tossed her out and detonated the bomb. The D77-TC Pelican dropship and the slipspace drive it was carrying were still there, but no sign of Jorge. "Noble Six, your pulse has elevated."

Cortez was the first one through the shield as he helped O'Brien through. "Watch the shell casings."

Shepard now landed next to Six before she started to scan the area with her omni-tool, "The ship still has atmosphere. That's unexpected."

"Well this is the epicenter," Cortez was the first to remove his helmet, "It's possible nothing here has been effected as much."

O'Brien removed his helmet as he stepped over a dead UNSC pilot, "Now the real question, how long their trip was to get here?"

"What's that suppose you mean?"

"Slipspace travel has unusual effects on those who traverse it," Dot responding to Shepard's inquiry while Six continued to examine the Pelican and the weapons she had expended during the firefight, "Example, two ships with the exact same mass and slipspace drive enter slipspace simultaneous and arrive at the same destination simultaneous as well. However, the first ship may have experienced a longer travel time compared to those within the second ship. UNSC protocols dictate that on prolonged slipspace travel, all non-essential personnel are to enter cryo-chambers until arrival to their destination."

O'Brien kicked one of the dead Elite Ultras near the Pelican, "OK, so under the assumption this Noble Five guy is a SPARTAN too, I'm having a hard time seeing him live longer than a week, even if he survived the slipspace expansion. I mean, what does he have for food?"

"MREs," Six walked back out of the Pelican with the empty wrapper in hand. Six started looking around the hangar bay, "Doors to the Sabres were damaged, so the only defensible position left would be the bridge." Six walked toward the door, remembering her assault on the corvette, and the subsequent deaths that followed.

* * *

><p>On board the Long Night of Solace Rho 'Barutumee had his surviving crew scan the unknown ship that had moved next to _Ardent Prayer_. Rho had life-support focused completely on the bridge as subsequent power went to gravitational controls and energy shields, leaving communication and weapon systems without any. They could now see the unknown ship bore the human English word 'Normandy' written on its hull. "Shipmaster, scans complete. We have found several human

life signs onboard this _Normandy_ vessel, along with a handful of nonhumans. One of them is Sangheili!"

"A captured brother, or a traitor. Regardless, we will give him back what little honor we can. And _Ardent Prayer_? What of her crew?"

"Nothing sir. Only five humans. They could be demons, or imps."

Rho looked to one of the monitors with a view of a green and blue planet below them, untouched by battle. "I want everyone combat ready. We are boarding and recapturing _Ardent Prayer_. No quarter. Then we will give our brother an honorable death and focus on trying to reestablish ourselves with the rest of the Covenant. This disgrace will not go unanswered."

* * *

><p>Six led the team through the passage she used to reach the bridge, her handy work along with the bodies of the other humans were found. With one door away from the bridge, Six had advised everyone to put their helmets back on, just to be safe. With everyone safely away from the door, Six activated it. When it opened a barrage of bullets went flying through the air continuously.<p>

Six wanted to look inside, though there wasn't an opening for her. She pulled off Emile's kukri, trying to hide it under her pistol while she tried to use the Noble comm channel in hopes he still had his open, "Noble Five?"

"Six?" The firing stopped now as Six slowly walked out from cover. "A week out here and you send out a rescue party. I was expecting it to be a month before someone found me. I'm surprised they gave you permission. So how's Reach?"

Six continued slowly forward toward Noble Five with a heavy heart, "There's a lot you need to hear about. But let's get off this ship first."

Six turned back to O'Brien, Cortez and Shepard as the trio was waiting for them. Jorge looked to the Commander and her unusual armor. "What's with the new armor?"

"Another thing we have to talk about."

* * *

><p>As Shepard continued to explore Ardent Prayer the _Normandy_ picked up a number of unknown life signs heading toward _Ardent Prayer_. Sork walked away from the CIC as he returned to the armory, "Advise the demon to prepare for battle, for battle will find them soon."

Ashley tried to stop him, "Where exactly are you going?"

Sork looked back to Williams for a moment, "Finding a means to minimize the bloodshed of my brothers. And a helmet."

* * *

><p>Returning to the hangar, Shepard and the others were preparing to leave for the Normandy before Dot started to speak, "Noble Six, multiple unidentified lifeforms have been detected by the _SSV Normandy_ heading toward _Ardent Prayer_."

O'Brien turned to Cortez, "Looks like we get to do what we do best."

"Dot?"

"Yes, Noble Five?" Six pulled Dot's chip out from her helmet before reinserting her. After that small display Dot spoke to Six in private, "Noble Six, I have also been informed that our Sangheili guest is attempting to board as well." Six couldn't tell Jorge to not fire on Sork, but if she didn't do something the two could be at each other's throats.

Everyone was prepared for combat, taking cover as O'Brien was using the gravity controls for cover with his sniper rifle watching the doors as they were being cut open. There was an unusual calm for a moment before an explosion took out the door. The smoke kicked up gave some cover, but it did little once everyone opened fire. Only three Grunt bodies rolled out from the smoke riddle with shots all over them. O'Brien looked up, "Bastards were a distraction! Head up high, they're using the balcony!"

Six grabbed one of the frag grenades still in one of the weapons cases and tossed it up to the terrace. The grenade wasn't primed before it was tossed, instead it was going to be used like a mine with O'Brien as its trigger. Both doors were blown open like the last however this time the enemy was fighting back. The Grunts were in firsts, wildly firing their Plasma Pistols and Needlers as Jackal support moved in. No signs of any Elites, but most of the group knew they'd be coming soon enough. O'Brien shot the grenade as Jackals were trying to create a sniper line, killing the whole group in the explosion.

However before the fight could get really intense, a single body being carried by was coming toward them. Six signaled to Jorge to hold his fire as the individual and monitor pass through the hangar's shield. The individual was the Elite, Sork 'Tasuvai, with a rather crudely made helmet covering his head.

* * *

><p>Sork tossed the helmet he had forged with Lamenting Lights aid as he walked toward the Shipmaster, Rho 'Barutumee. Rho and a trio of Sangheili warriors decloaked to pay their respects to Sork, "Light of Sanghelios, you have discovered an Oracle. With both of you at our side, our victory against the demons and their imps are secured."<p>

Sork grabbed Rho's shoulder as he was about to stand back up, "That is not why we are here, Shipmaster."

"But Light of Sangheliosâ€|"

Sork turned to the Oracle, "Oracle, tell them. Tell the truth as you have told me."

"Why certainly," Lamenting Light hovered to the center of the hangar to address all of the members of the Covenant his sensors could detect. He was now displaying the glyph the Covenant has sought for the last 27 years, a circle with a nearly complete ring around it. "Greetings. I am 2655 Lamenting Light. I will be educating you in proper Forerunner understanding. This symbol is the Forerunner glyph for Reclaimer, not Reclamation." Now Light displayed a hologram of a Halo ring. "These Instillations are weapons of last resort in response to the Flood threat. Their only purpose, beyond specimen studies, was the termination of all sentient life with enough biomass to sustain the Flood, thus starving them of their food sources."

"And the Great Journey? Are you telling us Holy One, our crusade has been for naught?"

"I still have no data as to where you meddlers misinterpreted the notion that activating the Halo Array would cause a 'Great Journey' other than death. And without the Keyships to reseed the galaxy, I'm afraid it would be a very void galaxy for a time."

All of the Sangheili and Unggoy were visibly disheartened but Sork lent out a hand to Rho, "Do not let this become your death my brothers. We must redeem our honor and forge a way through the fires the Prophets have created. Fight with me, and Pity will pay for what he and his kind have put us through."

* * *

><p>Jorge tried to get an understanding of the situation as it unfurled but without an understanding of the Elite language, it would be rather difficult. "What's happening? Why've we stopped fighting?"<p>

Cortez looked back to Jorge, having heard every word, "Well big guy, it looks like a theoretical plan of ours just might have a shot at work."

O'Brien and Six also eased up and regrouped. "So what now? We let the split lip and friends have the ship?"

Six started to walk toward them, "Something like that"

"Wait, where are you going?"

Six glanced toward Shepard, "A safer means to getting us back to the _Normandy_." With the DMR in her hand, Six calmly walked between Sork and Rho, continuing past every Covenant there and toward the corvette's communication center. Rho had an uneasy time allowing her though, but Sork ensured her safety as the two watched her continue toward where she had used to enter the ship during her assault.

* * *

><p>Rho quickly turned to Sork, "So the humans are the true Reclaimers of the Forerunner legacy?"<p>

"I'm afraid so my friend. But as I said before, let us not worry so much on the past. Let us instead turn this anger and frustration on the Prophets. It was the Hierarchs who insisted that humanity had to

be extinguished. I recall you supported offering the humans the opportunity to join."

"Their tactical capabilities and courage would have placed them in a position above the Jiralhanae." Rho now started to look back at all of the battles he had participated in against humanity, "And you believe the other Prophets knew about this deceit?"

Sork looked down, "I do not know. But I will find my answer before I personally see to Pity's demise for his treachery against me and what he had done to Fleet Master Rayta."

"I would be honored to follow you to save our brothers. And it will be an honor to have you on my ship."

Sork pulled his hand away from Rho, "I'm afraid I cannot accept your offer, Shipmaster." Sork looked back to the _Normandy_, "There is another that I must protect. The one who ensured I had the opportunity to show you and the others the true path towards ascendance, the young female quarian who has saved my life when I was ready for death's embrace."

* * *

><p>The Illusive Man and the Director were watching the events of Ardent Prayer unfurl before them. "Far better than I could have ever projected. Beyond the nonreligious Jackals and Hunters, Covenant moral was utterly broken the moment the monitor disproved their entire religion. And the other unexpected resources are a rather welcomed boon."

The Illusive Man had an image of Noble Five pulled to the side, alongside the remains of _Long Night of Solace_, "I want to know more about this Noble Five they found."

"Now that I can answer. Sierra-052, one of my Spartans. Reach was his home, before he was conscripted into the program. If you recall, that is also the same colony that was being glassed." The Director started to recreate Jorge's statistical charts from memory, "Catherine held each one of them with respect. And many of them, Jorge included, viewed her as a motherly figure. I too held the same level of respect, though I was usually one of the many 'faceless' scientists to them. She could always tell each one of them apart, even when they had their helmets on."

The Director had an unusually happy smile on his face now. To which the Illusive Man quickly shot down, "Director, I need more specifics about Sierra-052, not just these memories."

"Of course, forgive that trip I took. Jorge is an excellent fighter. Just like Six, Jorge is fully capable of operating many different weapons and vehicles, heightened speed, reflexes and strength. Unlike many of the others, he was rather sociable. He made many friends among his SPARTAN brothers and sisters, though he does have a bit of 'chivalry', as it were, more so than any of the others."

The Illusive Man isolated images of the YSS-1000 Sabre Interceptor, "How can we use him towards our advantage?"

"With our war with the Covenant, there isn't exactly anyone

sympathetic towards aliens. Like I said about the others, as long as human lives are prioritized, they won't have any trouble following. It's the wet work against the Alliance we do behind their backs we'll just have to ensure doesn't reach their ears."

The Illusive Man took a puff from his cigarette, "I'm curious as to how we can use this new 'rogue' Covenant group to our advantage. And the remains of that ship should be more than sufficient to give us technological superiority."

"Once the Alliance send ships to salvage the remains we shouldn't have any trouble acquiring everything we need."

* * *

><p>AN: **Can Jorge be manipulated into becoming another puppet for the Illusive Man, or can Noble Six find a way to prevent her friend from becoming a grim reaper she once was not long ago?

30. Chapter 30

Benezia's forces were now scattered throughout the Peak 15 facility; a small welcoming party awaited the Commander when she arrives via the garage, as a team of geth guarding the reactor from being reactivated, and should they fail to stop Shepard, Captain Ventralis has been ordered by Benezia to direct the Commander to the hot labs but should she survive that he is to kill her personally. And as an added measure, Alestia had been transferred to the Peak 15 facility by Saren's personal behest. With her remaining forces now acting as her last line of defense, Benezia started to force her way into the ancestral memories of the rachni queen, ensuring the deeper she dug the more painful it was for the queen.

The Sangheili commander, Nihai 'Tuyokee continued to watch the rachni screech in pain as Benezia continued her mental torture of the massive insect. One of his Sangheili soldiers walked up to him, "Commander Nihai, after this operation has concluded, are we to eliminate the queen?"

"That is to Benezia's discretions. It would seem that Saren had intended to use these insects as shock troops to supplement the krogans, however I personally do not see these rachni to be of any use if they cannot be given direction. I also find this method of extracting information to be rather boring."

* * *

><p>Six used the Sabre to tow the Pelican and its passengers back to the Normandy's hangar before returning the _Ardent Prayer_ to retrieve the other Sabres before the Covenant ship left. With all of the Sabres removed, _Ardent Prayer_ left the vicinity, awaiting Sork 'Tasuvai's command to strike.

Six left four of the Sabres and the damaged Pelican on the remains of _Long Night of Solace_ and latched her Sabre onto the underside of _Normandy_. Inside the _Normandy_ Jorge was having difficulty accepting the fact that Sork was also onboard, and cooperating with them. Six took this opportunity to explain everything to Jorge, from

the moment he disappeared to now. And she started by showing him Emile's kukri.

Jorge

>took the blade into his hands. He could tell both the blade and sheath have been well taken care of since he last saw it. He handed the kukri back to Six, "So how did they go?"<p>

"Fightingâ€|at least most of themâ€|" Six looked to her pistol, a tear slowly rolled down her cheek, concealed by her helmet, "Kat, she was sniped by an Elite while running to a fallout bunker when New Alexandria was being glassed. I was right next to her when the Beam Rifle went through the back of her helmet. Noble Oneâ€|he rammed a Pelican into a Scarab that was blocking Noble Four and me from completing one last mission. Noble Four, Emile, he was attacked by two Zealots while defending the _Pillar of Autumn_. He killed the first with his shotgun, but the second one snuck up on him and stabbed him through with an energy sword. He fought until his last breath, stabbing the Elite in the neck with his kukri."

"What about Jun? You didn't say how he went out?"

Six placed her hand on Jorge's arm, "Because there's some good news about that. Carter ordered Jun to protect Dr. Halsey while on transit from SWORD to CASTLE Base."

"Halseyâ€|she's alive?"

"The last time I saw her. She had faked her death. I think the Covenant was looking for her and the alien artifacts she was studying underneath SWORD Base." Six could see some joy come back to him, "I'm sure Jun has done everything to keep her safe."

Jorge looked away for a bit, his heart at ease knowing Halsey was indeed safe. "Of course he has," turning back to her with his usual smile, "its Jun after all."

Six pulled out the dog tags from her pouch, "These belong to you."

As Jorge put the tags back around his neck, O'Brien and Cortez walked up to the Spartans, "We never properly introduced ourselves. I'm Master Sergeant Cortez of the 105th. And this is O'Brien."

Jorge slapped Cortez's back, "I'm a bit surprised you Helljumpers are so friendly toward us. I thought you guys despised us or something?"

"Yeah well, I guess you could say there was some change of heart thereâ€|"

O'Brien stepped closer to the seven foot giant, "Hey, did you know a Spartan named Cal?"

"Cal? I haven't heard her name for some time now. In a lot a ways Six reminds me of Calista, both are excellent shooters, both could handle themselves in hand-to-hand, and both are always watching out for their allies. Last I heard she was listed MIA after an assassination on Heian."

"That's ONI bullshitâ€¦" O'Brien was clenching his fist as he looked to Jorge, "She died saving me from a Brute Chieftainâ€¦"

"Right, Spartans never die," Jorge scoff, "If only that was true. But if she kept you alive, she could have done it because she cared to know she at least saved a life before she died." Jorge laid a hand on O'Brien's shoulder, "She was always a sweetheart, helping others when she could. But she was also a bit shy too. She never really talked when she didn't have to." Jorge looked back to Six, "Another thing you two have in common." Shepard was listening to the four for some time now and decided to let them talk amongst themselves a bit longer.

* * *

><p>Garrus was in the middle of polishing O'Brien's gear when Ashley walked over to him. "So, what do you think about the new guy?"<p>

Garrus looked back, "It should be interesting to see how good of a fighter he really is. Even from back here you can tell he's seen a lot of action. I thought you'd be more concerned about Sork?"

"I am, but I'm just not so sure about him yet."

"Or is it because of that AI Six has." Garrus continued with the cleaning, "Maybe it's about time you cut them some slack about it. The thing was useful back on that asteroid."

"Maybe," Ashley turned to Six, "Or maybe it's just biding its time to join the geth."

"I don't think so."

Ashley looked to Garrus with a bit of contempt, "How are you so sure."

Garrus stopped waxing and looked Ashley in the eyes. "Call it a gut feeling. But Dot was completely complacent with just helping us and giving us warnings. I'm sure O'Brien wouldn't mind if you started talking with him again."

* * *

><p>As the demons and imps continued to speak to one another, Sork returned to engineering as he knelt down to meditate on the events that occurred on Ardent Prayer. Adams walked over to the warrior, "So how did it go over there?"

"You were correct, human. It would seem that my destiny now resides in showing my brothers the folly of our ways. I know the Fleet Master will hear reason, however I must ponder on the rest of the fleet and how they will respond to the truth. What will happen to the Yanme'e or the Kig-Yar? Will others attempt suicide as I once did?"

"That's something you've gotta to deal with when it happens. You can't exactly control everything or everyone."

"You express great wisdom, for a human."

"Comes with being old."

"Yes, if only age was all that was needed for wisdom."

* * *

><p>Instead of going straight to Noveria, Shepard was giving Six some time with Jorge to rekindle the obvious friendship the two shared and to get him up to speed on things. While Six did that, Shepard departed to settle a few things she wanted to investigate, from investigating an ExoGeni facility to wiping out a geth incursion mounted in the Armstrong Cluster and investigating the Cerberus facilities Six seemed to want to discourage from exploring. With Jorge informed now, Six had Dot modify Jorge's M247 HMG to utilize this galaxy's heatsink system by using the M247's ammunition box as a means to carry multiple heat sinks for the weapon to alternate between as the system vented the built up heat just as it once did for shell casings. If the gun itself didn't overheat the weapon could effectively be a never ending stream of bullets.<p>

* * *

><p>Unending Resolve and the fleet continued to patrol around Virmire's system, awaiting Pity's next orders. However, the Prophet had an urgent matter to discuss with the Fleet Master at is not sitting well. "My Prophet, it is bad enough that you have allowed a number of the geth onto our ships, but I cannot abide by this!"

"Please Fleet Master, you must understandâ€|"

"No! His is the voice of the Sovereign, not of the gods!"

The geth in the room remained motionless as Pity's chair hovered closer to Rayta, "Without you this transition won't be as smooth as it should. We must have faith. You should trust Saren, as I do. He will help us find true salvation. Can you not see it?"

Rayta turned away as he left the audience chamber, "I will only do so by your request, not because I trust him. He follows his own gods, we should be doing the same."

With Rayta gone, one of the geth projected a hologram of Saren, "_It seems your Fleet Master doesn't hold me in the same regard as you._"

"Forgive his overzealousness. He only seeks what he believes is best for the fleet and what is familiar to him. In time, and given the proper understanding, he will come to accept you and Sovereign as I have. Our true means of salvation."

"_So long as they can stop Commander Shepard, then all of our desires will come true._"

* * *

><p>Rayta had an emergency meeting with the other Shipmasters about Pity's latest request. "This is insanity! We cannot let this mocker continue!"<p>

"First these geth are allowed on our ships, now this! I cannot stand by this any longer!"

Rayta eased his brothers, "Comrades, we need to abide for the time being. But have eyes on the machines at all times. We may have to follow the orders from this false prophet, but when any indication of their lies surfaces, we strike, hard. Show no mercy to the machines, and I will personally confront Pity about it."

Each of the Shipmasters now knelt down before him, each resounding with one another as they all stated, "We are yours to command, Fleet Master."

* * *

><p>Horona waited for the other Shipmasters to leave before speaking with Fleet Master Rayta personally. "Fleet Master, you know we can easily take control over the fleet now. Just give the word and I'll have men wiping the geth out."<p>

"No, now is not the time to strike. I know the Light of Sanghelios wants us to watch for any signs of treachery from the Prophet of Pity, but this is not enough to get everyone behind us. The Kig-Yar and Yanme'e still abide to the Prophet's commands. However I believe the Mgalekgolo and Unggoy are starting to have their own doubts."

"We don't need the Yanme'e or the Kig-Yar. If we convince the Mgalekgolo and Unggoy to revolt against this, we can strike a heavy blow to Saren."

Rayta thought about, he was tempted, but he turned back, "No, it is too soon. If we attempt it now we would lose more than we would gain. Pity has only assured his fall, now we must be patient and strike at the proper time."

* * *

><p>"Nihai!" A Sangheili warrior rushed over to him and Benezia, "Gratitude has visually confirmed that the human ship Saren is looking for is making an approach to this world. Shall I order them to destroy it?"

"No, let them come." Benezia answered before Nihai could even speak. "I almost have the information we need. Once it is sent to Saren, it will not matter what happens here." Nihai didn't like Benezia undermining him like this, but he has his order to protect Benezia while she gathers the information.

* * *

><p>After a rather 'friendly' welcome by Noveria's traffic control, Shepard decided to have Wrex and Williams accompany her. At the entrance three security personnel were waiting, two human females and an older turian. "That's far enough."<p>

Shepard stopped, answering to the leader of the group, "We're not here to cause problems."

The woman with black hair however insisted, "This is an unscheduled

arrival. I need your credentials."

To which Shepard complied, "I'm a Spectre. My name is Shepard."

The blonde woman with a shotgun rejected the Commander's credentials, "Load of horsecrap, ma'am."

"We will need to confirm that. Also, I must advise you that firearms are not permitted on Noveria. Sergeant Stirling, secure their weapons."

This led to a series of muscle reactions, Williams, Shepard and Wrex all drew their weapons on the security team, as Sergeant Stirling and their turian partner also point their guns at the squad, with their leader glaring Shepard down the barrel of her pistol, with Wrex the one to break the sudden silence, "Don't try it."

There was a few seconds of pressure, but Shepard was the first to lower her pistol, "Let's not start a fight."

"Why not?" Wrex still ready for anything to go.

Before someone could cause anything the speakers activated, "_Captain Matsuo! Stand down. We have confirmed their identity. Spectres are authorized to carry weapons here, Captain._"

Matsuo's people eased their weapons as did Shepard's team. Matsuo stepped aside, "You may proceed, Spectre. I hope the rest of your visit will be less confrontational. Parasini-san will meet you upstairs."

Stirling however wasn't over what had just happened, "Behave yourself."

With such warm welcomes Shepard proceeded through the dock until alarms started going off. A woman in a sophisticated pink dress walked over to the counter, "Weapons detectors. Don't mind the alarms." She deactivated the system before properly introducing herself, "I'm Gianna Parasini, assistant to Administrator Anoleis. We apologize for the incident in the docking bay."

"I appreciate your help."

"You're welcome. You understand our security chief was only doing her job. One of my duties is orientation of new arrivals. Do you have any questions?"

Shepard looked around, making sure not too many were listening when she asked, "Has anyone unusual passed through here recently?"

"Unusual?" Parasini had to recall all of the visitors of late, "An asari Matriarch passed through a few days ago, Lady Benezia."

Williams whispered to Shepard, "Saren's second-in-command. She's here?"

To keep things going, Shepard quickly asked Parasini, "Can I speak with her?"

"Benezia left for the Peak 15 research complex days ago. To the best of my knowledge she's still there."

"That's where I need to be, then."

"You'll need to ask Administrator Anoleis for clearance to leave this port."

"Where can I find the administrator?"

"His office is on the main level. Left at the top of the elevator."

"Understood. Can we go in now?"

"Of course. If you need any help, you can ask me at the administrator's office."

With Parasini gone, and the front desk clerk busy, Ashely stopped Shepard, "Commander? Maybe we ought to tell Liara that her mom's here. Or bring her along. It might take Benezia off-guard."

"Yeah, now that we know Benezia is here, we're going to need to change our plans."

* * *

><p>Alliance R&D procured the remains of the Covenant Supercarrier Long Night of Solace and the other UNSC property left by Noble Six. Dot had tagged several items of interest for Cerberus operatives. Cerberus was able to acquire an adequate sampling of Covenant technology, along with one of the YSS-100 Sabre starfighters.

While Cerberus scientists started to unload their new toys, the Director started to review the progress of their many failed experimental shock troop initiatives that Shepard herself helped clean up. "Illusive Man, I've been thinking about the projects that have failed. Specifically your attempts at controlling the husk creatures on Chasca. I've noticed that during the conversion process that the eyes were usually the first thing to change."

"What are you getting at, Director?"

"Nothing. It's just that your ocular implants seem very similar to the first stage of husification. That's all. We wouldn't want anyone to think that you might become one of those things."

The Illusive Man didn't even bother to turn to the Director, "I can assure you Director, Cerberus' sole purpose is to ensure the dominance and survival of humanity. I will not let Saren or anyone else jeopardizes that."

The Director closed the few monitors he had opened about the project, "If you say so. I'll begin working with your people on reverse engineering Covenant technology. I will assume they won't need my help with the YSS-1000." The Director's hologram disappeared, leaving the Illusive Man to monitoring other cells and their progress.

* * *

><p>Nihai was using the geth to monitor the progress of the humans back at Port Hanshan, and he did not like it. When Benezia took a moment to rest from interrogating the queen Nihai walked up to her, "Benezia, we need to start planning a counter offensive, should the humans make it past the geth and these creatures."<p>

Benezia didn't even bother to look to Nihai, "Do you hold such little faith in the geth, Commander?"

"I believe in being prepared." Nihai looked back to the queen, "And these creatures will not be capable of holding off a military force that has bested even our people."

Benezia seemed conflicted for a moment, as though she was fighting herself, "Weâ€|willâ€|hold ourselves here. I almost have what we need. Once I send Saren the coordinates we can return."

Nihai walked away in anger, "Do as you will. I will have my men prepare an ambush at the tram stations."

With the Sangheili gone, Benezia turned to watch the door close. What little control she had over herself, Benezia was using to stall until Commander Shepard could arrive. She was hoping to be stopped by her before she could fulfill her mission to Saren.

* * *

><p>AN: **Who else agrees, the Illusive Man's eyes are creepy? Saren's alliance with the Covenant is starting to shake. Will Pity's plans succeed or can Rayta and his allies break free of Saren?

31. Chapter 31

**A/N: **This is my early Christmas present to you all, and also to those who thought we would all be gone after December 21. Sorry for the disappointment, but I still have a few things I'd like to do personally.

* * *

><p>Shepard had changed the team. Liara was asked to come with them when they confront her mother as Jorge joined them. Even though Tali wasn't going with them, Sork was still asked to join them. He agreed to assist only if Benezia had any members of the Covenant with her, however that would also require Lamenting Light to join as well. Shepard planned to contact the Normandy once they had started traveling to Peak 15 for the monitor to join them.

With Jorge and Wrex it shouldn't be difficult to keep Sork hidden from Noveria's scanners however Six was more concerned about Jorge and Sork trying to kill each other. Six was taking apart her weapons for routine inspections when Alenko came down to the garage. "Soâ€|Sixâ€|I just wantedâ€|"

Six threw out her left arm to him. "Screwdriver."

"Huh?" Kaidan looked to see Six's right hand was holding down a loose screw in place while her left elbow was keeping the pieces in place. "Right!" he immediately grabbed the tool and handed it off to Six. With the tool she fastened the screw down. "So what are you doing?"

"Maintenance," Six continued her work on the M392 as though he wasn't even there.

"You know, I've noticed that you don't use an omni-tool. If you had one it might make things easier for you."

Six finished reassembling her DMR, checking the sight and feel of the rifle. With everything fixed, Six placed the rifle down onto the table and grabbed her pistol to do the same. "Or it could make things too easy."

Before Six took the pistol apart Alenko scanned it with his omni-tool. "Well I've never actually seen this model before, but everything seems to check out." Six continued with disassembling the pistol regardless and found Sangheili blood staining the inside of the firing chamber. She flashed the dried out purple blood to Alenko before she removed it and continued with her inspection of the rest of the components. "Ok, so that blood wasn't exactly something they were calibrated to find. But still, I don't think it would hurt to at least have it."

Six put the pistol slide down and turned to him, "I'll think about it."

* * *

><p>Inside the Synthetic Insights office, after disabling security and dealing with the corrupt Elanus Risk Control Services, Sork kicked over one of the dead turians, "This is a waste of our time! We should be pursuing Benezia not indulging the demands of these corrupt businessmen!"<p>

Shepard looked back to Sork, "It's because of one of those 'corrupt businessmen' that we can't leave the port. Look the sooner we find the data the sooner we can continue."

Jorge however couldn't help but feel that they had a target painted on their backs, "Still can't believe we're trusting our lives with a split jaw."

"He's here to help us. Try to be civil about it."

Shepard soon found Qui'in's computer and inserted the OSD as it automatically grabbed the data they were looking for. Sork was watching their back with his active camo engaged. "Human, our exit is being blocked." Shepard and team turned to see more ERCS guards waiting for them.

As Shepard approached them it became clear who they were, Sergeant Stirling along with a number of ERCS personnel, "I don't think you're supposed to be in here, Shepard."

Shepard stood her ground, "Do you plan on making me leave?"

"Leave?" almost laughing at the notion. "You think I'm going to let you walk out? Uh-uh. Anoleis would throw you offworld for what you did here. I won't. You know what we did to cop killers on my world?"

Wrex snarled, "You're breaking the law for bribe money. You know what we do to dirty cops on my world?"

Shepard calmed him down, she turning back to Stirling. "I didn't want to fight them. They fired first."

Stirling didn't care. "Well, I don't need a gun to rip you to pieces." As her people moved to cover one of the turians was lifted into the air by unseen forces. "What the hell?" The turian struggled for a bit before an energy blade stabbed through the turian as Sork revealed himself. In his left hand was a Plasma Rifle as he roared.

In the confusion Wrex used his biotic to throw another turian against a wall as Jorge opened fire on the whole group with his newly outfitted M247 Heavy Machine Gun, forcing Sork to use the dead turian as an extra shield during the assault. Sork opened fire with the Plasma Rifle, killing the guard Wrex flung earlier. Stirling used her biotics to protect herself from Jorge's fire, throwing a number of biotic attacks at the group as Liara deflected them with her own barrier, giving Shepard an opening to fire on Stirling. Sork tossed the corpse to Stirling and left her to Shepard as he went invisible again to pick off the guards awaiting downstairs.

* * *

><p>Another group of rachni infested the tunnels Nihai and his people were traveling, cutting the bugs down as they tried to attack. "As I foresaw, these creatures will be no match to a real military force. The only advantages they had over the current security were tight quarters, numbers, and the element of surprise. These creatures are barely worth scrapping our feet on." Nihai looked back to see their progress, and the fact that they only lost an Unggoy due to his breathing apparatus being inoperable by acid from one of the rachni. Roars from more rachni echoed down the tunnel as Nihai and his soldiers readied for the next wave.<p>

* * *

><p>Without Dot, Cortez was overviewing their real situation with Jorge on a private comm channel, including the Director and Cerberus. "â€|and that's about everything now. Sorry to have to tell it to you like this, but we can't exactly trust Dot not to report everything back to them and we can't let the Alliance know about it."<p>

"_I don't blame you. And Six has burdened herself with trying to keep all of that from her too._" Cortez was aware of the hassle Six has to go through with keeping things from Dot, even avoiding discussions completely in fear that she might have Dot reporting it. "_I won't mention any of this around her._"

"Well seeing how close you two are, I figured she'd at least want you to know the truth about the more recent stuff, including the Elite 'ally' or why she might avoid you later on. I wouldn't want to burden her any further with what's going on, or to have her feel like she's

hiding things from you."

"_I still don't completely understand why we have to work with the Elite in the first place._"

"Well it mostly has to do with the monitor that's about to join you. Apparently the Covenant's whole religion and their genocide against us are all due to a mistranslation of an ancient alien language. It utterly broke moral, both with the Elite your with and that crew when we found you. We still have another fleet of Covies out there, and we can dissipate them by having the monitor tell them the truth. The Director also thinks this is a valid plan to neutralize the Covenant threat here and has ordered us to keep both the monitor and the Elite alive, at least long enough to achieve that."

"_So this Director and Illusive Manâ€¦|_"

Cortez leaned against one of the sleeper pods, "I don't know. One's from ONI, so you know that's trouble. The other is a brilliant mystery man with a lot of credits and strings he can pull. Those two together could move a lot. The only good thing I can say is that they have humanity's interest at the forefront. But that doesn't excuse them from doing some of the more tasteless things we've found."

"_What do you mean?_"

Cortez looked around to make sure no one was coming near him, "Commander Shepard recently went on missions that uncovered a few Cerberus operations. The mission where they found the dead Alliance Admiral, he was killed because he was getting too close. There have been otherâ€¦|incidents like that involving Alliance personnel that got 'too close' to uncovering Cerberus activity. Fortunately we haven't been a part of that, yet."

"_So why the hell are you guys still with them?_"

"Mostly because of Dot. We can't leave her in their hands but she won't be able to break the chain of command with the Director still with them."

Jorge was watching Anoleis being dragged off in cuffs by Gianna Parasini, "_That's going to be hard without the UNSC. Have any ideas on how to do it?_"

"Not yet, but hopefully after this thing with Saren we can figure something out. I'm not exactly holding my breath though. We might have to destroy Dotâ€¦|"

* * *

><p>Jorge was following Shepard to the garage, "Just keep me posted. And let's hope we don't have to resort to that."<p>

There was a rather jumpy ERCS guard at the garage. Most likely due to recent pressure from the Executive Board regarding interactions with the Spectre. "Access to the garage is restricted."

Shepard pulled out the card given to her by Parasini, "I have authorization. Excuse me."

The guard scanned the card, "Yes, that's genuine." The guard handed back the card as she unlocked the door, "Drive safely. The weather's supposed to be pretty bad out in the Aleutsk Valley."

As the team moved into the garage, Jorge readied his machine gun, "Something's starting to jam my motion tracker."

From behind one of the crates a geth hooper jumped up to the ceiling before shooting off to the floor. Wrex quickly grabbed for the Sokolov shotgun on his back, "So that's what the asari had in the crates."

Jorge didn't wait for anyone to command it as he opened fire on the two geth destroyers that charged at him. Sork walked around the tank in the middle of the room where he found a geth shock trooper waiting to ambush them. Sork activated his gauntlet's energy daggers and slammed it to the ground. Liara used Jorge's assault to grab one of the geth hoopers in a biotic field. While Shepard fired on the suspended hopper a geth rocket trooper fired off a rocket but Wrex moved in the way, using his shoulder and shield to take the blast before firing off his own Carnage at the geth and a few rounds from his shotgun as an added measure. Sork stepped onto the last hopper's leg, ripping it off as it tried to jump away. As it struggled to jump again Jorge stomped its head.

As the fight came to an end the doors behind them opened as several ERCS guards rushed in, "What theâ€"What are these things? Fan out and secure the area! No one gets in or out!" As the guards were securing the garage, Matsuo looked to Shepard, "What did you do here, Commander?"

"Me? The geth ambushed me!"

"Geth? You expect me toâ€" Matsuo stopped to look at the disabled machines on the floor, "where did they come from?"

Wrex blatantly pointed back, "The asari bitch came with a bunch of cargo. They were probably packed in those."

"I do not believe that. We did thorough scans of those. There were no power sources, no element zero massesâ€" Matsuo was filled with fear just from the number of crates with Benezia, "If Benezia-sama's containers were packed with these things, there are many more out there."

Shepard knew the geth were all going to try and stop her. "We've fought geth before. We'll take care of them for you."

"I appreciate that. My people are good, but few of them have combat experience. I must report to the Executive Board. If word gets out about loose geth, there may be an investor panic."

With Matsuo gone, Shepard continued to the end of the garage to find a M35 Mako waiting. Once everyone was inside, Shepard contacted the Normandy. "Joker, we're heading out. Tell Light to meet us at these coordinates. We should be there in about five minutes, if we don't run into too much trouble."

* * *

><p>As Lamenting Light prepared to depart the Normandy, Williams took this time to speak to O'Brien down in the mess, but there was an awkward silence between the two. "Soâ€¦"

"I'm sorryâ€¦" the two looked to each other as they said it simultaneously. O'Brien was rather surprised by Ashley. "I guess we could've said something earlier, maybe dropped a few hints about her existence."

"And I guess I might've overreacted when she told us. After the attack on Eden Primeâ€¦"

"Yeah, I wouldn't have any love for robots after that either. But not to sound rude about Dot or anything, but she's really flat. No sense of humor or anything."

"What I still don't get is why it's so placid? What did you guys do to make it so?"

O'Brien looked to his cup, "Truthfully I don't know jack about how they work. All I know is that they can't harm us and they follow our orders. And without them we'd've already have lost our war with the Covies."

"So you're absolutely sure that it will never do anything to harm us?"

"Look Ash, Dot's more like the VIs here, but she can get better at her work and learn from any mistakes or enemy tactics. Now if we could just make sure the same can be said about the floating light bulb then I think we'd all be squared away."

"Yeah well your fine. It sees you as its 'reclaimer' or whatever. All I know is that I don't like it."

"Yeah but with what Six said that thing was capable of on the moon, I'd really hate to fight it with what we have. There's no way we'd win."

* * *

><p>It wasn't very difficult for Lamenting Light to jam Noveria's scanners while he flew off to rendezvous with Shepard and their latest Reclaimer. The blizzard on the planet was rather harsh, however Lamenting Light's systems were able to compensate for the cold temperature. Light started to move through the valley he detected several geth signatures. Curiosity got the better of Light as he moved closer to examine them. As he did defense towers opened fire on him. "Really? How importunes!" Light opened fire on the towers, destroying each with a blast from his most powerful laser.<p>

As Light continued to destroy the towers firing on him, his scanners detected the Reclaimer on approach at a rather fast pace. He quickly hastened his efforts to destroy the bothersome defense towers before the Reclaimer and his associates arrived.

With the last tower destroyed the tank drove around the bend to find the smoking remains of the towers. Lamenting Light floated down to

the facility's entrance as the others moved inside, forced to go around the wreckage blocking the Mako's path. "I'm glad to see you are safe Reclaimer. Now I detect several active geth units throughout this facility. A number of them just on the other side of this wall along with a few of the krogan like your compatriot here."

Wrex make sure his shotgun was ready, "Thanks for the heads up."

Sork was using his active camo, waiting for the others to get ready as he activated the garage doors. With Shepard's signal, Sork opened the gate to reveal a geth repair drone floating above a geth Juggernaut. The geth slowly moved to investigate the unusual activity. The geth could see Sork as clear as day, readying its weapon. Instead two biotic attack pounded the geth's shields, forcing the geth to reassess its target priorities. A flurry of slugs was fired onto the geth as the repair drone swiftly went to work. Before it could be of significant help, a sniper rifle was used to bring the little drone down.

The slugs stopped for a moment allowing a Carnage blast to finish the geth off. The three krogans were holding their positions, waiting to see who was attacking them. Another sniper round was fired, hitting one of the krogans square in the face. The helmet took most of the damage, but he was still recovering as one krogan started to charge toward them.

Unfortunately for the krogan it was running right into a trap. As soon as the krogan ran past the door, Jorge unloaded his machine gun into the gut of the krogan. The second krogan charged over, but this one was firing his assault rifle as he got closer. Liara picked the krogan up with her biotics, allowing Wrex and Shepard to finish in their leisure.

The third krogan thought he was clever, waiting for them at the stairs where he could finish them one by one with his shotgun. But Sork was also waiting for him. Drawing out his Energy Sword, Sork threw the shotgun out of the krogan's hands before stabbing him through the chest as he slowly revealed himself. With little effort he tossed the dying krogan down the stairs.

As the body came to a stop, the surrounding speakers activated with a woman's voice, "User alert. Peak 15 facilities have suffered a great deal of damage. Biohazard materials present through facility. Virtual Intelligence user interface offline."

Jorge kicked aside some of the remains of the juggernaut, "Anyone have an idea as to what kind of bio-haz material they were working on?"

Wrex cautiously looked around, "I've done enough wetwork on this frost covered rock to never ask. But if I had to guess, it has something to do with this weird smell."

Sork was also looking around, "The air here has the subtle smell of a Drone hive." Sork continued to smell the air, "But something doesn't feel rightâ€¦"

Shepard cautiously moved to the upper level as she opened the door. Inside the decontamination chamber was a pair of turrets, pointing at

the other door. Liara looked to the two turrets, "Why are the turrets facing the wrong way?"

Wrex grunted, "They want to keep their people in as much as they want to keep others out."

* * *

><p>AN: **Well this mission just got a whole lot more interesting. Nihai and his men will have an interesting meeting that's for sure.

32. Chapter 32

**A/N: **Well its a new year and things still look like crap. Heres to our future...

* * *

><p>Reaching the next area via elevator the entire section was covered in snow. The glass didn't seem compromised and yet ice and snow had formed over everything but the door. "Maintenance is going to have one hell of a wash out when the heaters come back on."<p>

The squad, including Lamenting Light and Sork, were away from the door as Shepard readied to open it. As it opened a hail of slugs flew through the opening door. It took a few moments before the firing stopped.

Shepard spotted a geth waiting alone. It's dark coloring making it distinct against the snow. She swapped her assault rifle for the Naginata sniper rifle as she quietly too aim at the trooper. The geth spotted her and started firing, however it was too late for the unit and Shepard shot the light out. Jorge then pushed forward through the door, tearing a geth to shreds with the sheer number of rounds put into it.

Wrex moved in, using the overturned table for cover before he started to fire on the geth using one of the walls for cover. Jorge walked over to where he minced a geth to try and coordinate with Wrex to finish the geth off. Just as he turned around the bend a new geth knocked Jorge's weapon off balance. Jorge quickly countered the geth, punching it to the ground and pinned it under his boot before he finished it with enough force to cave the body cavity.

Another geth had walked into Wrex's blast radius as it tried to adjust for an assault against Jorge. The last geth was perching itself on a small stairway as it tried pick them off. Liara moved up to help, creating a biotic singularity to lift the geth into the air so the others could finish it off.

With the snow covered break room cleared of geth, the team moved back to back as their radars started picking up more targets. Suddenly a loud banging caught Liara's ears, "What was that?"

Jorge started to look around, keeping his finger on the trigger of his weapon, "Debris maybe. Or maybe an animal found its way inside." That guess was only enforced as a loud screeching noise started to

echo out at them.

As the screeching ended, multiple targets started to move in all around them. They were small green bugs that were buried by the snow. Jorge was about to step on one until Lamenting Light intervened and incinerated the pest. "Reclaimer, you should be more careful. My instruments detect high acidic levels within their minuscule vessels. It would not take much for the toxins to be spread unto your person. However your environmental seals should be capable of preventing any such toxins from making contact with your epidermis. As for the othersâ€¦"

Everyone started firing on the green insects, trying to kill them before they could get close enough to explode. Oddly enough the larger red insects weren't charging at them like the little one. Instead it looked like they were watching them, waiting for them to get closer. Sork took the invitation, dredging through the snow, swapping the Plasma Rifle for an Energy Sword. Both insectoids rushed at him, the first fired a ball of green goo that Sork barely dodge as the second one move in with its two long tendrils as the pods opened to try and claw at the Sangheili. Sork sliced the two pods off with the sword before turning the blade on the two bugs. He quickly cut the head off the first insect, using the body as a temporary shield against the second's acid before he used his energy daggers and stabbed it into the mouth of the second. There was a moment of struggle from the creature, but it quickly subsided when Sork pulled the blade up.

Sork tossed one of the creatures down the stairs for Light to scan and the other to examine close up. Jorge kicked the massive insect, "What in God's name were those?"

Wrex felt an unusual chill in his hump, "Damned if I know. But someone on this mountain does."

Lamenting Light quickly scanned the creature's body. "How interesting. Neurological scans indicate that the intellectual capacity of this creature is on par to that of a sentient lifeform. Physiologically speaking they are rather durable. Built for toxic environments, this assault drone is quiet the capable soldier. Both resilient and formidable."

"Drone?"

"Yes doctor. This creature's makeup would suggest a hive based society. And I detect two more drones of similar makeup within the immediate area."

"Then we better flush them out." Jorge slowly walked up the stairs, purposefully ramming into Sork along the way. Jorge's motion tracker wasn't picking up anything, but he could feel something was watching him. He walked into one of the rooms where another one of the insects popped out of the ducts in a surprise attack. But thanks to Lights warning, it wasn't much of a surprise, for Jorge. He opened fire on the creature as soon as it popped out.

Shepard was also searching for the second bug before they moved on. Shepard wasn't planning on letting any of these things pose a potential threat, either to her team or anyone else alive on this station. She and Wrex checked the second room, finding nothing of

interest. Liara was investigating the last room, just like Shepard and Wrex's room there was nothing. However as she was leaving the room, one of the insects popped out of the ducts. Before T'Soni could react to the creature's charge Sork killed it with a burst from his Plasma Rifle.

"Be more aware of your surroundings doctor." Sork walked past her to crush the insects head to ensure the kill.

The team moved on to the next elevator. Jorge still went out of his way to 'bump' into Sork. Reaching the next level the passageway was too narrow for them to try the same maneuver executed below. Shepard signaled Jorge to take point as she prepared to open the door.

The doors opened to reveal a group of the little greens around several machines. "Commander, doesn't look like they're near any delicate equipment. Should I light 'em up?"

Shepard looked around to be certain of Jorge's assessment. Shepard tapped Jorge, "Rip through 'em." Jorge tore through the first group of bugs as more of them charged into the fray, only to meet a very short spirited charge.

With the all clear the team slowly moved into the room. As they did Liara stopped at a power terminal, "Shepard, that is a backup power system for the station mainframe."

Wrex was keeping an eye out, "So whack it and turn this thing on."

As the systems kicked in the VI reacted. "Critical startup error. Virtual Intelligence user interface offline. Manual boot required."

Lamenting Light then floated over, "Allow me, Reclaimer. Such a simplistic system should be little trouble for me to solve."

Every fiber in Shepard's being told her not to, but the sooner they found Benezia the better. "Do it. And make it quick."

Light floated over to the mainframe to begin his work on restarting the VI unit. It only took the monitor mere moments for it to reactivate the VI. The orange hologram of a human female appeared before them, "It looks like your trying to restore this facility. Would you like help?"

Shepard moved forward to the VI hologram, "You're the virtual intelligence that runs this place?"

"This system is monitored to respond to the name 'Mira'. May I ask your name?"

"Commander Shepard. I work for the Citadel's Special Tactics and Reconnaissance."

"One moment, please." Mira's information centers started a search to verify. "Council authority confirmed. You are entitled to Secure Access of all systems. Please note that queries relating to corporate secrets require Privileged Access. Privileged Access is only available to Binary Helix executives. The system is ready to process

queries. You may access me at any holographic interface within Peak 15."

Lamenting Light returned to the interface, "Commander, if I may? I could override the VIs control over the system. From there I could access all of the data we require. It would be a simple procedure thaâ€|"

Shepard quickly ended that thought, "No! If we do that it could compromise the facility even further. We do this the old fashion way." Shepard turned back to the VI, "I need to find Matriarch Benezia."

"Lady Benezia departed on the passenger tramway to the Rift Station subsidiary labs. User alert! The tramway system is currently inoperable."

Jorge looked away, "This is gonna take foreverâ€|"

* * *

><p>A pair of Mgalekgolo were on patrol around the perimeter of Saren's compound, rather routine, however the Covenant fleet recently shot down an unidentified ship attempting to land on the planet. Special Operation teams were sent to investigate the crash site where they only recovered a few bodies and little else. Saren identified the bodies to be an alien species called salarians, and that the species' specialty was espionage and intelligence gathering. There was a report recently from the geth of unidentified activity just outside of the radar of the southern entrance.<p>

In 'good faith', as deemed by Pity, Covenant forces would patrol the perimeter of the compound while the geth created more anti-air defense towers and widened their range. As the bond brothers continued on their patrol one of the Mgalekgolo heard something. Moving away from its bond brother, it slowly crept toward the sounds to investigate further.

As it did a weapon fired, lodging a slug into the Mgalekgolo's neck. The shot only proved to anger the bond brothers as the one that was shot withdrew its head and raised its shield while its 'brother' rushed to its side and fired off its assault cannon into the bushes. The stream of radioactive incendiary gel burned away at the brush only to reveal the remains of one of the indigenous crustacean lifeforms of these beaches. The two found the remains of a pistol and what appeared to have been a trip wire, set off by the, now roasted, crustacean. The 'injured' Mgalekgolo's neck stretched back out as it undulate until the slug was removed as well as any dead Lekgolo. With no sign of the individuals who place this trap the bond brothers continued their search elsewhere.

When the two Mgalekgolo were out of sight though an unusual being came out of hiding from the deep water. A rather gangly green scaled alien in combat armor crawled out and picked up one of the dead Lekgolo from the shallow water where it was dropped.

* * *

><p>Finished with gathering information from the Mira, Jorge dropped his weapon back down ready to engage, "So how do we do

this?"<p>

Shepard looked to the team, "We split up. I'll take Sork and Liara to reactive the reactor. Wrex, Jorge, take Light, find the landline and reconnect them. We meet back here before we proceed to Rift Station."

Separated from Jorge, Sork conferred with Shepard within the elevator, "This was a wise strategy. I do not believe he and I could work efficiently together. His anger over the knowledge of Reach's destruction will only cause more hate."

"Well Six and the others weren't exactly thrilled when they had to work with you. After listening to a few of their talks about Reach, I didn't think the two of you needed to confront each other about it, yet."

Sork nodded in agreement. "Let us find Saren's mistress and be done this frozen world."

* * *

><p>As Jorge, Wrex and Light rode the elevator up to the roof Wrex finally turned to Jorge. "So tell me, who'd win in a fight between you and Six?"<p>

Jorge uncomfortably looked to the krogan, "Right now I'm not in the mood to talk."

"Nevertheless Reclaimer, tactical evaluations are essential for improvement. Why, even the Prometheans, the greatest warrior-servants of our society, would often test their merit against one another to ensure peak efficiency. Even nowâ€|"

"Can you can it for a bit?" Jorge started shake his mind of the idea that he'd have to fight Six, but it kept coming to him. He didn't want to think about it, but with her connection to this Cerberus and Dot, he may have to raise his weapon against her one day. "Ifâ€|if we really had to fight one another, to the death, no else one getting in the way or anythingâ€|I might have the advantage, due to my experience. But it would also depend on location. Six can be tenacious when she wants to be. If I made any mistakes, she could get the jump on me. She can be one scary bitch when she wants to be."

Wrex turned to Jorge with respect, "Well at least you have the smarts to think about these kinds of things. Unlike Garrus or Alenko. Sometimes you never know when an ally might turn into an enemy. Especially if that indoctrination crap turns out to be real." The elevator doors open, "Well for now we've got some bugs to squash."

Jorge followed Wrex on the path to a door. As the door opened the blizzard rushed in. The two veterans weren't exactly fazed by the chilly weather, but it would make spotting the enemy a bit more difficult. "See any of them?"

"No. But that doesn't mean something ain't here." Wrex had his shotgun in hand, slowly walking out onto the roof first as he passed a pair of antenna, making the available space harder to

traverse.

Wrex took a moment to look around before he slammed his shotgun against the antenna. There were a few responding shrieks that came through the blizzard's howl. He prepared for a fight, unfortunately he wasn't expecting their numbers. Wrex fought against the number, firing as often as he could and using his biotics to push back one of the bigger ones. Jorge stepped in, his HMG at the ready as it plowed through anything dumb enough to get within his targeting range. Wrex moved around back to finish off one of the larger bugs he had shot up. The creature was immobilized, two of its legs were no longer capable of supporting its weight and the two tendrils were caught in one of the metal antenna. Wrex put his feet onto the creature's head before letting his weight do the rest. Wrex immediately turned back to the battle as he helped Jorge finish off the creatures.

* * *

><p>Having cleared most of the area, Shepard and Liara moved to the fuel lines to restart the reactor. As they did though a geth Juggernaut opened fire on them from the upper level. The geth had adequate cover from Liara's biotics and their weapons. Sork silently moved up a ramp as he slowly moved to the Juggernaut's position. Sork was invisible when he opened the door to the balcony. The Juggernaut turned to the door, expecting something but its optic couldn't detect a thing. Slowly the geth moved into the room to investigate. As it did two energy sources spiked before one of them struck its optic.<p>

Sork's energy daggers were impaled into the geth's eye and chest, twisting them into the machine as he listened to the internal components fail. When he no longer felt the geth functioning he deactivated both daggers and kicked the geth to the floor.

Shepard looked out to see the geth fall. She threw her thumb out, "Nice job, Sork. Now just to reactivate the reactor and hope Wrex and Jorge reconnected the landlines."

"We need not worry about that." Sork walked back down the ramp, reuniting with Shepard, "You have not heard of tales of a single demon slaughtering scores of my brothers in combat. He will not fall to some insects or these machines, less he is unworthy of his demon status."

* * *

><p>Several days ago, Captain Kirrahe and his team from the 3rd Infiltration Regiment STG were sent by the Citadel Council to investigate unusual activity within the Hoc system. Unfortunately it proved to be more than just unusual. Upon arriving to the system and attempting to reach the planet Virmire their ship was shot down by massive unidentified alien crafts. Most of the team survived land down but were forced to abandon most of their equipment with the ship as teams were sent to investigate. Kirrahe has made daring trips to salvage what they could from the ship, though it wasn't much. He had his men focus on completing their original mission: to investigate any possible leads to Saren.<p>

However as they continued they found one disturbing fact after another. An unknown, technologically advanced coalition of alien

racers has begun to work alongside the geth and Saren. The STG has started cataloguing the various alien species and their apparent role within this coalition. The massive turian-like reptiles with mandible mouths served as military commanders over all with armor color and design designating their more specific role. A stout, plentiful species that required methane appear to only serve as standard infantry and cannon fodder. Another reptilian species, more delicately framed in comparison to their commanders, were support units with energy shields gauntlets and snipers. With the latest sample to study they have learned the massive walking tanks are a gestalt of worms-like-creatures working in unison, an organic version of the geth as it were, and always in pairs of two. There have also been sighting of two more species, a flying insectoid race and something that reminded them of the hanar if they were covered in metal plates. They could only speculate at their duties within this coalition, but should Saren decide to assault the Citadel with this army, they have the potential of overthrowing the Council.

But the worst of it wasn't uncovered until more recently. The STG team had discovered that Saren has been researching a cure for the genophage, the genetic mutation created by their people to quell krogan numbers. This facility had to be destroyed at any cost; unfortunately the captain didn't have the firepower or manpower to do it, coupled with having lost half of his surviving team investigating all of this, Kirrahe had a transmission sent back to the Council. Unable to establish proper interstellar communications without the risk of drawing unwanted attention, Kirrahe hoped that this emergency transmission would still be picked up and that the Council would take the proper measures to eliminate both the unknown alien coalition and the facility.

* * *

><p>AN: **I still don't understand people who follow a story that is complete? I mean I've never gone back to do anything new.

33. Chapter 33

**A/N: **Wow it's been a while. Well we're almost done with Noveria.

* * *

><p>With the landlines reconnected and the reactor back online the team encountered another group of the insects that were awaiting their return. After dealing with them the team continued to the tram station and the decontamination station. They also came across an unexpected sight, a pair of the big red bugs were trapped within the decontamination chamber. "They're locked in."<p>

"The door could be finessed. It appears that the trams to the subsidiary station are beyond it."

Jorge looked around the room, "This terminal looks like controls for the chamber."

Light floated over as he zapped the terminal to examine it. "You are correct Reclaimer. Unfortunately there seems to be a hardware fault

that is preventing proper failsafe systems from activating. A simple repair actually."

"Do it," Shepard walked past the monitor, "just try not to screw it up somehow."

She was more concerned with the dead salarian on the floor with a pistol in his left hand. Upon inspection Shepard found an entry wound just below his ear hole. There was an active terminal next to him. _"â€|control grouâ€|â€|loose in theâ€|they'reâ€|can't escapeâ€|up the tunnels now. We're sorry. The leads couldn't get toâ€|â€|struct. â€|out while you canâ€|_"

Liara lowered herself to the dead salarian, "He killed himself. Because he was part of whatever happened here."

Wrex has killed plenty of salarians himself, "Among my people, a suicide's body would be left for scavengers. The nathak will get to him eventually."

Sork however had some reverence for the salarian. "Though he should have died fighting, he has chosen to end his life before they could do it for him. However he should have saved such a measure against a worthy adversary."

Before Wrex or Jorge could say anything Light shouted, "Success! As expected, these systems are fairly simple to repair. It is now ready for activation."

Shepard walked over and pressed the button, activating the chamber's plasma vents. The two insects screeched in pain as they attempted to claw their way out, however the plasma was too much for them as they were reduced to nothing but ash.

With the venting completed the team moved back to open the decontamination chamber. Jorge stopped as his motion tracker started picking up something. As he turned one of the floor panels popped opened as another bug tried to join the party. "Sorry ugly, it won't be that easy!"

Shepard took aim at the bug but Jorge's HMG handled it. "You alright?"

"Gonna have to scrub the bug juice off when we get back, but otherwise just fine."

Liara opened the doors to the chamber as everyone joined her inside. Liara opened the next door as the one behind them closed. As the door opened a number of the smaller one were just standing around. Once the door was fully opened they started to charge straight into Liara's biotic singularity field for everyone to shot.

Continuing down the hallway Sork stopped them as he started sniffing the air. "What is it?"

"The reason why you asked me to comeâ€|" Sork started walking ahead, "Oracle, I will need your aid."

* * *

><p>Nihai didn't like it. Their motion tracker had six target but they suddenly stopped. His men were position around the entrance as three Type-42 Plasma Cannons manned by Unggoy were ordered to open fire should the enemy break through their line. Before Nihai or one of his men could investigate, two of the unknown targets started moving closer to them. Everyone tensed up as their weapons were ready to kill. Moments of anticipation the two targets stop just before the turn.<p>

The tension continued to build as Unggoy overcharged their plasma pistols. Something completely unexpected to them emerged from around the corner, "Greetings, I am 2655 Lamenting Light."

The team immediately lowered themselves to the Oracle's unexpected encounter and Unggoy were forced to discharge their weapons to the ground. "Praise! For an Oracle of the gods has found us to give us its immense wisdom and sacred guidance for salvation!"

"No, it has notâ€|" from around the corner Sork 'Tasuvai, the former Light of Sanghelios, appeared before them.

"Heretic!"

Nihai grabbed one of his men's weapon and lowered it, signaling the others to do the same, "Let us hear this heretic out before his execution. I want to know why he has an Oracle with him."

Sork lowered himself to his knees, removing his weapons from his person before he spoke. "The Prophet of Pity has charged me with treason for a crime I did not commit. But it is he who has committed treason to our Covenant. Look at where you stand by brothers, who we've been forced to ally with. Tell me, with your own words, are the geth truly whom we wish to have beside us?" Sork could see his words cut deep to them all. "Heed me, my brothers, our strugglesâ€|" Sork now was at a loss for words. He could not bear to tell them the truth now, but had to say something. "Our struggles do not have to be for nothing. This Oracle will show us our path, but for now I need you all to return to Fleet Master Rayta Nar 'Zaconomee, wait for the moment when Pity's true colors are shown and his death secured."

Nihai was silent, looking to his men as he tried to think about Sork's words. Nihai then looked back to the tram tunnel to where they left Benezia. "Men, we are leaving this system. The Matriarch has completed her mission and so have we. Return to Gratitude so we may help prepare defense lines."

The Unggoy grabbed the weapons as the team turned invisible. Nihai bowed to the Light of Sanghelios, however before he too disappeared, Sork raised his hand, "Commander, are the scientist here aware of your team and their purpose?"

Nihai raised himself, "They are. Saren's mistress has also given them orders to send the human commander to the 'Hot Labs' as they referred them to when she inquired about her location. Should the human survive, her disciple and the security personnel are to execute her personally."

Sork nodded, "Very well. We will be prepared for the situation." Nihai cloaked and left, pausing only to gaze upon the demon but he

soon walked past him to join his men in leaving the planet.

* * *

><p>Jorge watched as each one pasted him, questioning Shepard's strategy. "Are you sure this is alright, just letting them go?"<p>

"Would you want to fight these numbers in such tight quarters?"

There were a few that Jorge couldn't see, but even he knew the Covenant held the advantage, tactically speaking. "I'd feel better if we didn't just let them all walk out like that."

Wrex wasn't comfortable either, "These things are still willing to put a blade in our backs. Killing them would give us less opposition when we find Saren's base. If anything else, it'd at least get my blood flowing." Shepard ignored them as she continued onward where Sork and Light were waiting within the tram.

* * *

><p>Reaching the Rift Station Shepard and the team found survivors bunkered down near the elevator. With the information from Nihai, Sork remained hidden from sight as Lamenting Light remained with the tram while Shepard pretended to be completely in the dark about Benezia and her orders.<p>

Captain Ventralis seemed rather reasonable, however there was something unusual. Shepard was ready to leave, "Yeah, I hear thâ€" Ventralis paused as the unmistakable sound of the creatures in the vents as they started to screech. "Hell! Man the perimeter!"

Ventralis grabbed his gun as his two men readied for attack. Jorge moved to the duct as the first bug pushed its way out. Jorge rammed his M247 to the creature's chest and let loose. The second one popped up with Liara waiting with her biotics. She lifted the insect into the air, unable to defend itself the others unleashed on it until it dropped to the ground.

With both bugs dead Ventralis folded his rifle, "Thanks for the help. Every few hours, a group comes up the tram tunnel. It's actually better since we locked down the elevator."

Shepard looked back to the bug, remembering what Light told them, "They always attack here? It's an obvious killzone."

Ventralis nodded, "Their only other option is over the mountain and down through the ducts. And they freeze like everyone else. I don't know why they keep throwing themselves against our defenses. Even animals should learn not to stick their noses where it hurts."

* * *

><p>With this unique absence of Sork on the Normandy, Six took the opportunity to shadowbox in the hangar while still fully geared though she had pulled Dot from her armor and secured her within her hard case so she could, mentally, be alone. But she also

had another reason for doing it, she has some pent up emotions she needed to vent; about Duvall and Roger's death on Eden Prime, about Cerberus, and about the Director. Even since her conscription, Six has been a shell of her former life, never talking about her feeling about anything to anyone, even after Jorge's apparent 'death' months ago and Kat's death shortly thereafter, she started to become emotionally distant from the rest of Noble Team. Six's imaginary opponents were the Elites from her childhood, the Elite that killed Kat, and any other Covenant bastard she could think of while completely ignoring everyone nearby that started to crowd around.

"Damn she's fast. Even with the armor on."

Garrus was admiring her flexibility she was capable of with full combat gear still on, "This is nothing. You should see her in action. Nothing, not even a krogan could stop her when she has an objective in sight."

"Wonder why she's doing this? Do you think she knows we're here?"

"Only one way to find out. Hey Six nice moves thereâ€¦!" One of the crew members was foolish enough to try and walk up behind her. Six had deactivated her motion tracker, hearing someone behind her she pivoted her heels, gathering as much speed as she could with her left arm ready to strike. Six was however able to stop herself from hitting the poor crewmen square in the face, leaving on an inch of error between her knuckles and his nose as her fist was slightly shaking.

Six was breathing slightly heavier than when she was training as she just stood there staring at him. After a few moments of staring him down, Six's fist opened as she walked away from him. Cortez walked over to the man as he grabbed his shoulder, "You're rather luck she has such great control. You'd be dead if she made contact."

Garrus turned to Cortez, "Is she really that strong?"

Cortez looked to Six as she was leaning against one of the workstations, "I've only seen a few Spartans in action, and even fewer times where they had to get up close and personal with the enemy. Let's just say Elites respect them for a reason."

* * *

><p>Ashley and O'Brien were still talking with each other, "Even after all the shit I gave her, thinking she was a guy the entire time, she still was willing to save my ass three times in one mission."<p>

"How do you live with it? The guilt I meanâ€¦!"

O'Brien looked at his reflection in his cup of coffee, "I don't know. I guess when Six showed up, I thought I might have a second chance to say thanks or something, ya know?"

Ash tried looking into O'Brien's eyes, but he was so fixated on his own reflection. She tried jarring him out, "So why is it that ODSs and SPARTANS have such a rivalry? It has to be something big like how

the two started out or something."

"It's not so much a rivalry as it is a dislike of them. Hell I don't even think the SPARTANS cared that we hated their guts. The reason why we, the ODSTs, detested SPARTANS is because how everyone had conveniently forgotten it was the ODSTs who were fighting and dying against the Insurrectionist and winning several key battles. When the Covies showed up, ONI eventually decided to reveal them to the general public and hype them up by calling them the 'super soldiers who never died'." O'Brien looked away again, "To us they were lab freaks. People hyped up with special genetic engineering and drugs. But if we were superior to them, why is it that she saved my life, twice, from the same Brute with a Grav Hammer. Hell, I never even thanked her. She just yelled at me to finish the assassination mission, then she had us promise to send research data to someone named Halsey. She never cared if she lived or died; she only cared about our safety and ensured the missions were successful."

Ash reached out to O'Brien's hand, "I can relate. Seeing 212 getting wiped out, I feel like it was my fault for trying to push back to retake the space port even though we had no idea what the hell hit us. So don't think you're the only one who has people to thank or ask for forgiveness."

O'Brien got his smile back, "Yeah well seeing how Garrus is busy making my armor squeaky clean, why don't we see who's really the best shot between us?"

* * *

><p>After creating a cure for Dr. Cohen's sick colleagues, Alestia's true colors were revealed. She and team of geth and an asari commando lay dead on the floor without the combat assistance of Sork. Jorge was looked at the two dead asari on the floor before he turned to Sork, "Think you could have helped there, ugly!"<p>

Sork deactivated his active camo, "Not with the geth and you firing so wildly. If the geth had seen I was with you, then Benezia might attempt to reestablish communication with Nihai and his men. That and I was not going to risk you attempting to kill me."

"Enough!" Shepard stopped the two from arguing any further. "Thanks to Sork's friend we were ready for her. Now we need to find a means to Benezia without forcing Ventralis to attack us."

Wrex kicked over one of the geth bodies, "I'm sure the volus saw something. He's probably the only one out there willing to talk."

Walking out of the lab they found the dead guard with a hole in his skull. Han Olar waited for Shepard to get closer before pointed to the maintenance access, "They came out of there."

"You mean the gea€the inorganics the asari had with her?"

Olar nodded, "Benezia brought them with her."

Shepard looked over to the door, "How can I get into the maintenance area?"

"A team lead would have access. Like Dr. Cohen. He's in the medical bay."

Shepard nodded to Olar, "I'll be going."

"Yeah," emotionless, even after witnessing the death of the security guard before him.

Shepard had the team reconvene back in the lab to discuss what was going to happen. "We can't risk these rachni leaving the facility. We need to clear out the Hot Labs."

"Now you're talking!"

"Sorry Wrex, but Jorge will handle it. Jorge when you pass Captain Ventralis just lie to him and say you're going back to make sure the trams are clear. Once we talk with Dr. Cohen and get access to the maintenance area we'll deal with Benezia."

Jorge turned to their Sangheili, "And him?"

"I will assist in the bug hunt. The geth will only prove more bothersome then they are worth dealing with. And I do not need to feed more fire for Pity to use against me or my brothers."

Shepard looked to the two, seeing the sparks already flying, "I don't like it, but try not killing each other while you do that. Wrex, Liara, let's get to it."

* * *

><p>The lie worked, as Jorge and Sork were both now heading to the Hot Labs to deal with the rest of the rachni. Once they reached the level Sork had his active camo engaged as the two discovered a human just sitting in a chair in the middle of the rather vacant room, his leg poorly patched up. After learning of a rachni queen still within Rift Station and Binary Helix's attempt at creating a rachni slave army Jorge looked around, "So what are you suggesting? We bring the queen down here?"<p>

"No. I am sorry, but this will not work. These rachni are beyond saving. It is a sad thing, but they must be euthanized. I am thinking that the neutron purge must be set."

"I'm not familiar with the purge system."

"It creates burst of neutron radiation. Kills everything within the station. Things beyond get genetic damage of varying degree."

"How do we set off the purge?"

"Arming controls are nearby. All you do is insert the key. Then I will give Mira destruct coâ€œ" Sork's energy sword activated behind the man as it sliced off one of the rachni's tendrils. In the confusion Sork knocked the human back as his active camo deactivated and he and the rachni roared at one another.

Jorge helped the man back up as he readied his weapon, "My kingdom for a can of Raid." Sork jumped out of the way allowing Jorge to open fire, pinning the rachni against the glass until it was nothing but a

blood covered body.

Sork turned back to the humans, "Quickly before more of them arrive." Sork picked up the human as Jorge covered their back.

Inside the small room the Sangheili dropped the human as Jorge closed the door. "Alright now what?"

The man hobbled over to the VI interface, "First I arm system. Then you two lock door and get to upper levels before I detonate purge."

"No, we aren't leaving you here."

Jorge was about to grab the man, but his leg was starting to bleed again as he supported himself against the interface in obvious pain. "Sorry, no time left for me. But I can still fix mess created. Go. System has two minute delay timer but I will override for immediate activation."

Sork walked away from the human, pausing to Jorge who was unwilling to leave. "Demon, he has chosen his fate, penance for his transgressions here." Sork slowly placed a hand on his EVA shoulder pauldron, "The other demon will not accept it should you fall here."

Jorge knew he couldn't leave Six again, but to leave this man to die like thisâ€¦ "I'm sorry."

The man smiled, "No my friends. I should be thanking you. Now go."

When the door closed Jorge punched in the controls for the door. Their motion trackers started picking up a massive convergence onto their position of uncountable numbers. The two rushed back to the elevator as rachni started popping into the room through the ducts. Sork slashed at a few but their intent was to stop the human from activating the purge system. Now they were in the elevator as they were heading back up. As they did, Sork turned to Jorge, "My kingdom for a can of Raid? You humans are willing to sacrifice so much for so little."

* * *

><p>Yaroslev Tartakovsky, a rather average human working for Binary Helix. He however had a hand in unleashing these 'broken' rachni through Peak 15 and killing so many of his colleagues. He was given a chance to make amends thanks to those two strangers. As the rachni were clawing at the locked door, Yaroslev activated Mira's interface, "Online. How can I help you?"<p>

"Activate neutron purge."

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that without proper code authorization."

"Codeâ€¦" Yaroslev's leg was hurting but he muscled through the pain, "Code input: 875-020-079. Code Omega local execution."

"Code Omega execution in 120 seconds."

"Override. Code Omega immediate local execution. Authorization code: 792-638-873."

Mira's hologram paused as it processed the new data. "Authorization code accepted. Code Omega immediate execution." And with that Yaroslev closed his eyes before the neutron radiation killed him and all of the rachni in the Hot Labs.

* * *

><p>AN: **Now all that's left is the Matriarch herself (and the small army at the ready), and finding Saren.

34. Chapter 34

**A/N: **Relatively early update, but that's because of block-o-text.

* * *

><p>With access to the maintenance area, Shepard's team proceeded with caution in anticipation for security or geth. Instead they found a lone rachni warrior in the snow that they were easily able to deal with. Continuing on they entered the large room to find the Matriarch in an elegant black gown and matching headdress as she was staring at a very large indigo rachni trapped within a glass containment pod. "You do not know the privilege of being a mother. There is power in creation. To shape a life. Turn it towards happiness or despair. Her children were to be ours. Raised to hunt and slay Saren's enemies." Benezia then slowly turned to them, "I won't be moved by sympathy. No matter who you bring into this confrontation."<p>

Shepard turned to her companion, "Liara's here because she wants to be. Not because I asked her to."

Benezia was not convinced, "Indeed? What have you told him about me, Liara?"

Liara stepped forward to confront her, "What could I say, mother? That you're insane? Evil? Should I explain how to kill you? What could I say?"

The Matriarch turned back to Shepard with a supercilious look, "Have you ever faced an asari commando unit before? Few humans have."

Shepard tried to avoid the fight, even if she was indoctrinated as Shiala said. "I can't believe you'd kill your own daughter."

Benezia argued, "I now realize I should have been stricter with her." Before Shepard or her squad could take cover, Benezia trapped them with her biotics in a stasis as her commandos rushed in to flank them. Once the commandos were in position the stasis' effects wore off and the team rushed to cover.

* * *

><p>Lamenting was hovering about, counting the rings and their

varying thickness in the ice surrounding the structure, the droplets of water that found their way through the cracks within the walls, anything to keep his processors busy until the Reclaimer, the interloper, or Shepard returned. As Light was about to start humming to himself, the doors the other entered through opened with the Reclaimer and the interloper walking through, "Welcome back. What has transpired to the others?"<p>

Jorge looked around, "I guess we're the first ones back. So now what do we do?"

"You could help me with cataloging this unusual temperate increase that occurred roughly twenty thousand years ago. The surface temperature reached a staggering 9 Â°C instead of the current surface temperature of -1."

"I'll pass." Jorge then turned to Sork, who was now kneeling in mediation in the middle of the room. "Hey, hinge-head. About that researcher down thereâ€|"

"What is there to say? He and the others of this facility brought this upon themselves when they agreed to cooperate with Saren and breed him an army. Unlike the amphibian who also chose death, that human had the courage to face his with honor and to take the mistake of all here with him."

Jorge never expected to be having a conversation with a Sangheili, especially with what the Covenant has done to humanity and to Reach, "Yeah well, it hardly makes up for everything your kind has done."

"Nothing ever willâ€|"

* * *

><p>Concurrently, Shepard's team fought off another wave of Benezia's forces, this group was composed entirely of geth. Liara created a singularity field to expose all of the geth to the team. After all of the geth were destroyed, they returned to Benezia, Wrex with his shotgun still in hand. The once powerful Matriarch was on her knees, leaning against the table, picking herself up as Shepard approached her, "This is not over. Saren is unstoppable. My mind is filled with his light. Everything is clear."<p>

"The rachni didn't cooperate with you. Why should I?"

Benezia looked back for a moment, "I will not betray him." She was leaning against the table again, "You willâ€|Youâ€|" she suddenly regained her composure and turned back to Shepard, "You must listen. Saren still whispers in my mind. I can fight his compulsions. Briefly. But the indoctrination is strong."

Shepard however remembered Shiala's words, and how strong she made the indoctrination sound. "Why are you able to break free of his control now?"

"I sealed a part of my mind away from the indoctrination. Saving it for a moment when I could help destroy him. It will not last long."

"So you could turn on me again."

Benezia lowered her head in shame, "Yes. But it would not be my will, Shepard. People are not themselves around Saren. You come to idolize him. Worship him. You would do anything for him. The key is Sovereign, his flagship. It's a dreadnought of incredible size and its power is extraordinary."

Shepard knew it couldn't have been the Covenant, seeing how concerned Sork was on Feros. "Sovereign's not like other ships. Where did it come from?"

"I cannot say. The geth did not build it. And the Covenant did not bring it. Its technology is far more advanced than that of any known species. The longer you stay aboard, the more Saren's will seems correct. You sit at his feet and smile as his words pour into you. It is subtle at first. I thought I was strong enough to resist. Instead, I became a willing tool, eager to serve. He sent me here to find the location of the Mu Relay. Its position was lost thousands of years ago."

"Someone on Noveria found it?"

Benezia turned back to the contained rachni, "Two thousand years ago, the rachni inhabited that region of our galaxy. They discovered the relay. The rachni can share memories across generations. Queens inherit the knowledge of their mothers. I took the location of the relay from the queen's mind. I was not gentle."

Even with this information it didn't tell them much. "Why does Saren need the Mu relay?"

"He believes it will lead him to the Conduit. I would tell you more if I could, but Saren did not share his counsel with me. I was merely a servant to his cause."

"You can still make it right. Give me the information."

"I was not myself, butâ€"I should have been stronger. I transcribed the data to an OSD. Take it. Please." Benezia walked up to Shepard to hand her the OSD.

"Knowing the relay's coordinates is not enough. Do you know where he planned to go from there?"

"Saren wouldn't tell me his destination. But you must find out quickly. I transmitted the coordinates to him before you arrived. You have to stopâ€"me." Benezia was now grabbing her head in pain, staggering away from Shepard's team, "I can'tâ€"His teeth are at my ear. Fingers on my spine. You shouldâ€"Uh, you shouldâ€"

"Mother, Iâ€"Don't leave! Fight him!"

Benezia had enough strength to look back to her daughter, "You've always made me proud, Liara." Benezia head lowered for a moment before it was lifted again. She slowly turned back to them as her biotics flared around her, "â€"Die!"

Wrex had no qualm with killing Benzia, using his biotics to knock her off her feet. Before Wrex could attack her, more commandos rushed in

to attack them. Shepard held off the group to their right as Liara handled the team on the left. Benezia was given enough time to get back to her feet as she started attacking Wrex. The old krogan used his shoulder pauldron to take the shots at such close range, knocking the Matriarch back with a punch before he used his shotgun.

Liara used a singularity field to hold the commandos in the air as she used her pistol to finish them as Shepard got into close-quarters with them, using Alliance training to knock them to the ground and finish them before they could get back up.

Benezia was leaning against the container, bleeding, "I cannot go on. You will have to stop him, Shepard."

"Hold on. We've got medi-gel, maybe we canâ€" "

Benezia stopped her, "No. He is still in my mind. I am not entirely myself. I never will be again."

"Motherâ€" tears were in Liara's eyes as she wanted to be with her.

Benezia smiled to Liara, "Good night, Little Wing. I will see you again with the dawn." As her vision faded she seemed more fearful now as her arm reached out, "No light? They always said there would beâ€"ahâ€" Benezia's eyes closed as her arm fell and her body became limp.

With Benezia gone, Wrex turned to Liara, "If you want to hate someone, hate that turian bastard who forced her to fight us."

As Liara was left grieving, Wrex started to scavenge around the geth and commandos while Shepard got a closer look at the rachni. Suddenly the rachni screeched out to Shepard, causing her to back into one of the commandos who was back on her feet. Shepard's drawn pistol moved to the commando, who was staggering toward the container before she turned to her. "This one. Serves as our voice. We cannot sing. Not in these low spaces. Your musics are colorless."

Wrex and Liara joined Shepard as she noticed the commando was struggling to speak, and not because she was dying. "Who am I speaking to here?"

"We are the mother. We sing for those left behind. The children you thought silenced. We are rachni."

Shepard walked past the asari, looking at the rachni itself. "How are you speaking through her?"

"Our kind sing through touchings of thoughts. We pluck the strings, and the other understands. She is weak to urging. She has colors we have no names for. But she is ending. Her music is bittersweet. It is beautiful."

Shepard activated her comm, "Jorge, status?"

"_Commander, we've cleared the Hot Labs. We're sitting pretty up here, waiting for you._"

Shepard took a few steps away from the queen, "What exactly happened

down there?"

"_One of the scientists was just waiting down there with an injured leg. He told us everything. From their initial plans to clone an army, to taking the eggs from the queen to try and control them. At this point I'm not sure who the real monsters were; the scientists or the mindless bugs._"

"Numbers?"

"_We set off the neutron purge system to eliminate everything in the Hot Labs and as we were leaving our motion tractors picked up hundreds. What's going on Commander? Do you need reinforcements?_"

"I'll fill you in on the details later." Shepard returned to the rachni queen, demanding an answer, "Did you order your people to kill the science team?"

"No. we were locked away here. The children are beyond our songs. They have been lost to silence. You are not in harmony with those who hoped to control us. What will you sing? Will you release us? Are we to fade away once more?"

Wrex look up to the top of the container, "There are acid tanks rigged up on that thing. Set them off. Millions of my ancestors died to put these things down. Don't let them come back."

Liara paused to look to her dead mother before she turned to Shepard and shook her head, "They made a mistake. They let the krogan go too far. This is a chance for us to atone. She has done nothing to us."

The queen was rather calm about the situation, with little to no control of her own fate now. "Your companions hear the truth. You have the power to free us, or return our people to the silence of memory."

Shepard was uncertain, wanting more information from her first before deciding. "Are you a survivor from the war? A clone?"

"We do not know. We were only an egg, hearing Mother cry in our dreams. A tone from space hushed one voice after another. It forced the singers to resonate with its own sour yellow note. Then we awoke, in this place. The last echo of those who came out from the Singing Planet. The sky is silent."

"If I let you live, would you attack other races again?"

"No. Weâ€"I do not know what happened in the war. We only heard discordance, songs the color of oily shadows. We would seek a hidden place to teach our children harmony. If they understand, perhaps we would return."

Shepard was hesitant in her decision. Normally someone higher in the chain of command would, or rather should be making this decision. However given everything that has occurred here, and testimonies from her and Jorge, Shepard finally made her decision, "I won't destroy your entire race. You'll go free."

Wrex turned to her yelling, "Are you stupid? Your people didn't fight these bastards, so maybe you don't get it!"

Shepard sternly looked to Wrex, "Maybe you've been blinded by old war stories."

Wrex scoffed as he walked toward the exit, "Do what you want. My people will clean up this mess later. Just like we did for the salarrians."

"You will give us a chance to compose anew? We will remember. We will sing of your forgiveness to our children."

Wrex shouted back to Shepard, "Great. Bugs are writing songs about you. Mark my words. You'll regret this."

Shepard walked over to the controls, pressing a sequence of buttons. The container started moving and the rachni queen released her control over the dying commando. She watched as the container attached to an exit, turning back to Shepard for a moment in thanks or remembrance before she made her way out.

* * *

><p>After the crew meeting, and a heated discussion from the turian Councilor, the Normandy received news from the Council about the possible location of Saren's base of operation. It wasn't much, a garbled up transmission on an emergency channel sent by one of their salarian Special Task Group sent to find it.

Cortez and O'Brien were talking with Jorge, privately, about the events that unfurled on Noveria, "I think she's nuts! Letting those things loose again is a bad idea."

Cortez turned to Jorge, "What do you think? You were there fighting them."

Jorge was still trying to get the light green blood off his armor, "Well I can't blame them for going insane like that. From what Shepard said, they basically broke their minds before they even had a chance to develop. I don't know, they kinda remind me of wingless buggers without guns that spit acid."

"Oh nice. I'm not gonna be able to look at a bug the same now."

Jorge smiled, but he looked around, "Say, do either of you know where Six is?"

Cortez looked to the elevator, "Yeah, she told me she wanted to chat with the Commander about something and not to worry about it."

O'Brien jumped topics, "So you and Squid-Head fought off an army of those things."

Jorge lowered his head, "We didn't. One of the scientists. He was still alive, but he was injured. He chose to stay behind and detonate the purge system after we got out of there. He wanted to stay behind."

O'Brien and Cortez looked down too, reminded of Cal's sacrifice for O'Brien. "I'm sorry. We didn't know."

* * *

><p>Shepard stopped to the med bay to talk with Liara. Despite the events the befell on Noveria, Liara seemed rather calm and collected when Shepard arrived, though she was slow to get up from her seat compared to her other interactions. "If you are here to talk about Benezia's death, you need not bother. She brought it upon herself."<p>

"Don't pretend it doesn't bother you. She was your mother," knowing she would be heartbroken if it was her mother, who fortunately was currently XO of the _SSV Kilimanjaro_.

Liara's head lowered slightly, "She wasâ€|but she was not. I prefer to remember Benezia as she used to be, before she was corrupted by Sovereign's power."

Shepard smiled, "The best of your mother lives on in you: her determination, her intelligence, her strength."

Liara put on a strong face, "That is kind of you to say. I appreciate your concern, but I am fine. Benezia chose her path, just as I have chosen mine. I am with you until the end, Shepard."

* * *

><p>AN: **I cut off here for a very special reason. I didn't want to cut into something else that happens on board. So, sorry for the tease, but you'll have to wait now.

35. Chapter 35

**A/N: **Rolling down a hill, can't stop writingâ€|

* * *

><p>As the crew settled back to their duties, Shepard was finishing her report in her office when a knock came from her door. "Come in."<p>

It was Six. She entered and waited for the door to close behind her. She displayed Dot's chip before putting it into one of her pouches, "Does the offer still stand, ma'am?"

Shepard moved a chair over for her, "Of course." She waved her over to take a seat, however Six refused and just stood, "What did you want to talk about? Is it about my decision about the rachni?"

"Partly, ma'am." Six's arms seemed somewhat shaky before her fists clenched, "I don't think we should have trusted it."

"Does this mistrust stem from your history with the Covenant? Or is there something you know that I don't?"

Six looked away, "It could be, but their history doesn't help disprove the possibility of war either."

Shepard closed her eyes, collecting her thoughts on the matter, "When we spoke with her, though her interpreter, she seemed genuinely sincere. And from how she described it, it sounded like her people were forced into the war by something else. It could have been the Reapers, but if they needed the coordinates for the Mu Relay, why revive the species if they had it long ago? Something else was pulling their strings and I think this queen will do her best to raise a better colony."

"If you say so, ma'am."

As Six was about to leave, Shepard stopped her, "What was the other thing you wanted to talk about? It seemed rather important to you."

Six was facing the door as she looked to her armor covered hands and slowly closed them. "Hitomi"

"What?"

"Hitomi" Six turned back to Shepard, removing her helmet, "that was the life I once knew, before it was taken from me." She pulled out her combat knife from its sheath. "It was with this blade that helped end that life." Shepard fell silent, allowing Six to continue at her own pace. "2525 was the year when the Covenant declared war against humanity. We retreated from Reach on August 30, 2552. That was over two months ago from when the events of Eden Prime occurred. I was born in the year 2531."

Shepard was shocked, partly by how long their war with the Covenant has been but mostly to the fact that Six was only twenty-one years old, eight years younger than herself, and yet she was a lieutenant. Shepard was rather impressed, assuming the UNSC's ranking system was anything like the Alliance's, and as much as she might not want to admit at times, her combat skills far exceed those of any N7 graduate. Shepard was hesitant to ask, however Six seemed ready to answer, "What do you mean?"

Six looked to the blade as it reflected her face, "2537, Covenant forces were continuing to press into human controlled space at a nearly unstoppable pace, slaughtering and glassing every world they encountered. I lived on one of the Outer Colonies, Eirene. My mother worked at the city's spaceport and my father was a technician. Our house was just outside of the city limits. We had our own grassy hill I would often play upon during the summers," that brief happiness Shepard saw on her face quickly died, "Then a week before my birthday, a man in black came to our home with several soldiers following him. My father called him brother and told me to go upstairs and pack my things. I didn't know what was going on, and I was hugging my stuff turtle, Kameko. When I started to pack, explosions started to happen around the house. I hid under my bed with Kameko before the floor collapsed underneath us. I awoke to gunfire around me. I crawled through the debris of my house with Kameko in hand when I saw them." Six's fist was tightening around the handle of the knife. "I didn't know what they were at the time, but they were tall ugly monsters with mandibles, clad in blue armor, and one of them had my father in his hands before stabbing him with

an energy sword through his chest. The soldiers attempted to fight back, but they were all slain by them. One of the soldiers had been tossed right next to me. Blood coming out of his mouth, unresponsive" Six turned the blade, "I took this combat knife, left Kameko and snuck up to one of the monsters who remained. I found mother, her eyes glazed over and under part of what was left of our home. Tears were running down my face, but I didn't cry. I jumped onto the monster's back and started stabbing it repeatedly into its neck as it tried to pull me off. Eventually it fell but I continued to stab at it over and over and over, getting more of its purple blood covering me. When I finally stopped, I looked up on the grassy hill to find another one. It was just watching me kill its comrade. Unlike the one I had just killed that one was in purple armor with more ornamental additions to the helmet. It said something to me, but I couldn't understand it. Then it just left. I walked my way back to the spaceport with this knife and Kameko. That was the day Hitomi died."

"Six" you've been through so much at such a young age. Have you ever talked about this to anyone?"

She sheathed the knife, "You're the first."

Shepard felt honored, and yet sad at the same time. "So is that why you joined the UNSC? To become a SPARTAN and get revenge against the Covenant?"

She shook her head. "I was found by another man in black. When I arrived at the spaceport, the man was waiting for me. He told me that I was special and that if I wanted to survive I had to go with him. He took me to a small shuttle with marines and other children, orphans whose parents were killed, like me. Most were covered in dirt or blood or both, however I was the only one covered in purple blood. We left Eirene behind and they took us to a planet they called Onyx to Camp Currahee. They told us we were to become the next generation of SPARTANs, Beta Company. But of the 418 they had gathered, only 300 of us would pass for augmentation."

"What sort of augments are we talking here?"

"The specifics were never detailed to us, but I understand their effects." Six lifted her free arm as she looked at it and flexed her muscles, "Our muscles are stronger than any humans will ever be able to attain naturally, our bones have become unbreakable, our vision is sharper, and our reaction time is far superior."

"They were turning you into super-humans. And they forced this onto children?"

Six's arm fell back to her side, "Only the ones who passed their tests."

Shepard now was trying to put everything into perspective, "So your family was killed by the Covenant, of which you kill one of, then a man in black took you to a training facility to become super-soldiers against your will?"

"Not entirely. We were orphans with nowhere to go. A lot of the others wanted revenge for what happened."

"And you?" Shepard looked Six dead in her eyes, "What did you want?"

Six broke contact, looking down to her feet, flashing back to when she first arrived to Camp Currahee. "I don't know," her head lifted back up with resolve, "But what I do know was that I never wanted to feel as powerless as I was that day. I never wanted to see people dead because I wasn't able to do anything about it." Six's fist was slightly raised as it shook, "And I've failed many times since that day."

Shepard understood Six a bit better now, her lone wolf attitude wasn't because she was out to prove herself, or because of a sense of superiority. She was unconsciously trying to protect everyone, at the cost of her own life if she felt it was necessary, compounded with survivor's guilt. However there was something bothering her, "Why talk about it now? Why me?"

Six's head tilted slightly to her helmet under her left arm, "While you were on Noveria, I was training. One of the crewmen walked up behind me and I almost killed him."

"This might need some explaining."

"Like I said, I was training. I completely zoned myself out from the rest of the ship when someone came up behind me. I pivoted to strike, but stopped myself when I saw he was human. In my mind I was fighting that purple armored Elite, and a few others."

Shepard murmured to herself, finally remembering why Six's tale sounded so familiar, "Hmmâ€¦ kind of sounds like Sork's storyâ€¦"

"Commander?" Six quickly came to attention when she heard that, despite Shepard saying it under breath.

Shepard saw fire in Six's eyes, possibly revenge. "Nothing. Forget I said anything." Six however rushed out of Shepard's office and back to the elevator as Shepard tried to give chase, "Six!" The elevator was already going down to the garage and Shepard couldn't do a thing from where she was. "Damn it! Joker, lock down the elevator!"

"_Wait, why?_"

"Just do it!"

"_I'm trying. Something has overridden the elevator controls, I can't do anything. What's going on, Commander?_"

Shepard slammed her fist against the door, "No time! Patch me into the ship's comm system. Engineering, now!"

* * *

><p>The elevator opened as Six rushed out. Jorge turned to her, "Hey Six, over here!" She completely ignored him, turning to engineering. Jorge grabbed his HMG, leaving his armor behind, "Come on, something bad is about to happen!"<p>

With no time to put on their armor either, O'Brien and Cortez grabbed their SMGs and followed. In engineering Six had her combat knife drawn in front of Sork's face while he meditated, "Was it you? Were you that Field Marshall on Eirene?"

Sork's eyes opened as he slowly picked himself up, "Youâ€¦" Sork was actually smiling now, "I was correct in believing you would become something special. A demon no less." He slowly took a step back as he entered a combat stance, "Are you here to fulfill our pledge?"

"Pledge?"

Sork activated both of his energy daggers from his gauntlets, "Yes, you remember? I vowed to you on that hill that when you learned the ways of battle, you and I would have a one-on-one duel to the death. So, are we to complete our vow in blood or will we suspend this battle until the Prophet of Pity has been eliminated? Either path suits me. However, I will not fall before Pity does."

Six pulled out Emile's kukri as she too entered a combat stance with a blade in each hand. Cortez yelled at her, "Six! Come on don't do this!"

The speakers in engineering activated, "_Six,_" it was Shepard, "_don't do it! You're better than this!_" Six ignored her as she and Sork started circling, forcing Tali and the engineers to get out of their way. "_Six, if you really want to be at peace with your ghosts, then you have to be the one to put away your weapons, just this once._"

"Ghosts?" O'Brien turned to Jorge, "What is she talking about?"

Jorge may have been her friend, but she had never talked about herself to him before. "I've never seen her like this. She's as angry as Emile can be on a bad day. Someone said or did something to set her off like this." Six's back was to them now, and Jorge walked up behind her, placed his hand on her shoulder. "Sixâ€¦it's alright."

Her hands were shaking, not from fear but frustration. It was several moments before Six dropped both blades onto the ground, to which Sork deactivated his gauntlets and took a less imposing stance. Six turned back to Jorge, still somewhat shaking, "Jorgeâ€¦I'm sorryâ€¦I'm sorry for abandoning youâ€¦for not being able to protect Reach for youâ€¦Iâ€¦"

"You didn't abandon me, remember? I threw you out of the ship. And Reachâ€¦well, I know you did everything you could to protect her and her people. From the numbers you guys told me, I doubt anything more could have been done."

As the two Spartans left, Cortez and O'Brien collected the blades and returned to the garage. Tali was still a bit stunned by the sudden event. "What was that all about?"

Sork quietly watched as they left, "Do you not remember the tale of the child warrior I created a blood vow with? The human child that bested one of my warriors? Just for that child, I learned the name

the humans called the world that we attacked; Eirene. That very child has grown to become a demon. Where it not for the Prophet of Pity and my brothers, I would have fulfilled our pledge without hesitation. Victory or death, either one would have been honorable for both of us."

Tali was somewhat upset and concerned at the fact that he had such a passion to fight Six now, however she knew there was nothing she could say or do to change his mind about it.

* * *

><p>Shepard managed to get down to the garage now where Jorge was trying to help Six calm down. "Six, I'm sorry about that. I didn't think you'd hear me, and right now we can't have you two at the other's throat. We have a possible lead on Saren's base and I need everyone fully committed, including Sork. Personally I'd hate to see you and him fighting to the death, but I doubt I'd be able to stop either of you if the two of you did." Six seemed a bit calmer than when she stormed out of Shepard's quarter, though she wasn't talking. "We're going to the Citadel to resupply. If you need some shore leave, I'll permit it."<p>

Cortez walked over to her, "We haven't gotten off the ship for a while, other than for missions. I think taking some time off on the Citadel will do us all some good."

* * *

><p>On the Citadel, everyone was taking some time for themselves to relax or blow off steam. Williams and O'Brien went to Flux and hit the dance floor as Wrex hit the casino for a few games of quasar. Liara and Kaidan were relaxing on the Presidium; Kaidan was sitting on a bench near the Mass Relay monument while Liara was traveling about, admiring the many architectural wonders and the gardens. Jorge and Six were just walking around the Wards together, chatting and generally having a good time, trying to forget about the Covenant for just this moment. Garrus pulled a few strings with Chellik to let him into C-Sec's shooting range to get in some target practice. Sork remained within the ship, preferring the solitude of the drive core to the packed Citadel station, and even had he gone he would have had to use his active camouflage the entire time. Cortez was with Tali and Shepard as they were in the markets purchasing new weapons, armors and upgrades.<p>

While they were shopping, Shepard stopped at a small novelty shop. There was nothing there that she wanted, rather it was for someone else. It was a small little turtle plushy keychain. The adorable little thing was only five credits too.

* * *

><p>Saren and Pity were watching as the next group of salarian test subjects fell under the thrall Sovereign's indoctrination. "It is quite the shame. The loss of such intellect. But they make for quiet the interesting sleeper agents. Prisoners of war 'rescued' by their comrades, only for them to turn around and stab them while they sleep."

"Yes. I have found that the more power the indoctrination exhorts the

less capable the subjects become. This could prove useful for your cowardly Unggoy, or to keep a better leash on your Kig-Yar."

"Hm—perhaps. But for now, I am interested in what sort of gifts the Sovereign is willing to bestow to those who are willing to receive."

Saren smirked behind Pity's back, "Yes. There is much of which can be offered."

* * *

><p>Nihai and his men were debriefed by Rayta and Raja personally. The news that the Light of Sanghelios had an Oracle accompanying him seemed to only solidify the justification to revolt. "Fleet Master, we must act on this! Even the wrenched Kig-Yar cannot deny this evidence!"<p>

Rayta raised his hand, quieting his friend. "What evidence beyond eyewitness testimony? The words of a few will not sway the hearts of the many. We require something else, the Oracle itself perhaps to appear before the rest of the fleet will join us." Rayta looked to Nihai, "And yet, something troubles me still. 'Our struggles do not have to be for nothing'? What is the meaning of his words? And if he had an Oracle, why wait so long to act?" Rayta walked over to a terminal where he projected a hologram of the star system they were currently in. The fleet's position was scattered around Virmire after the embarrassment of the salarian ship's penetration. "We may have the planet surrounded but not all of our positions are—defendable. I want Unending Resolve, Gratitude and Relentless Salvation to patrol with the agricultural ships."

Raja saw the hole in the defenses that would give Sork and his allies a chance to break through the planet's atmosphere. He slammed his fist against his chest, "As you command, Fleet Master. I will relay these orders personally."

As Rayta was left alone he returned his gaze upon the hologram. Perhaps I am being over analytical of the Light of Sanghelios' words, or perhaps I am not taking them seriously enough. Regardless, with the presence of these salarians still on the planet, a confrontation between the human commander and Saren is inevitable.

* * *

><p>Returning to the *Normandy*, everyone seemed more energized, even Wrex who only netted a small profit from the casino. Shepard had been requested by Admiral Hackett to investigate two listening posts out in the Styx Theta cluster that suddenly went quiet. While on transit to the cluster, Shepard had Six join her in her quarters. "Ma'am?"

"Relax Six, this isn't anything negative." Shepard pulled out a small brown paper bag and handed it to her. "Open it."

She reached inside, and after she felt the small item she was hesitant to pull it out. Six moved to pull Dot out of her helmet only to realize she hadn't reinserted her since she walked into Shepard's

quarters last time. Once the item was removed from the bag it was revealed to be a small turtle plushy with a pink bow on its head and a green shell attached to a chain. "She looks just like Kamekoâ€|" Six carefully closed her hand around the small toy and pressed it against her chest, tears rolling down her checks, "Iâ€|Iâ€|"

"I thought perhaps you might want to have something that could remind you of the simpler life you had before all ofâ€|this happened," motioning to Six. Six however couldn't care less what Shepard just said, holding onto the small toy in its embrace, something she hadn't done since the first Kameko was taken from her. Six then tied the chain to one of her chest pouch strings as the little turtle keychain now hung onto her.

* * *

><p>AN: **Yes, I kinda took a little(remember little) inspiration from Daisy-023(just the toy thing). Yeah, well the next update probably won't be for awhile.

36. Chapter 36

**A/N: **Hmâ€|I was expecting to have updated one of the other stories before I got to here.

* * *

><p>Upon arrival to the Erebus system they picked up a weak distress signal, "Mayday, mayday, mayday. This is Lieutenant Marie Duran, 3-14th Infantry. Alliance 10th Frontier Division. The listening post has been overrun by unidentified hostile life forms. Request immediate extraction."

Located on the first planet, Nepmos, Shepard had Jorge, Six, and Williams join her to help however they could. Using map data collected by the _Normandy_, they headed southeast of the Mako's landing zone. Due to the hazardous condtions, Six secured her new Kameko within her hard case and reinserted Dot into her suit. Dot had been given strict parameters by Six to never look through her memories without prior consent, though she recently allowed her to do so long as it was related to the Prothean visions.

They found the remains of a small outpost with three Alliance marines courageously defending themselves against rachni warriors. Jorge was the first one out as he started cutting though the bugs as Six provided precision cover. Shepard noticed their turrets weren't firing. As Williams joined the others, Shepard took a look at the generator for the turrets. They were out of power, but the Mako had plenty to spare. Shepard ran a line from the Mako directly into the generator to bring the turrets back online.

With Shepard joining as well, the rachni were quickly decimated before they had a chance to get within striking distance. As the smoke cleared, one of the marines on scene saluted, "First Lieutenant Durand, ma'am. Third Brigade, 14th Infantry Regiment. And I am damned glad to see you."

"We heard you needed some back up."

"Actually, we need to get the hell out of here. But I guess your ship couldn't carry us all," turning to the two barracks full of injured. "They dropped us here a few months back. We get supplies every couple weeks. We didn't see anything local that was more dangerous than lichen. Yesterday, these animals started coming out of the ground. No idea where they're from. This is what's left out of 90 men. I'm the ranking officer."

Williams looked around, "Why are you out here in the first place?"

"There's been a lot of pirate activity in this cluster. We set up a chain of listening posts in the local systems, in case they have a staging base."

Jorge looked to the acid burns left on the walls, "They're not animals. They're a sentient species called rachni."

Durand was visibly exhausted, "Never heard of them. Can't say I care. What we just fought was a probe. Our seismic sensors are picking up a crapload more on their way up from underground. We've got five minutes, tops. We might be able to hold them off if we were at peak. But you can see the fighting's busted this place up."

Shepard nodded, "Do what you can to secure your positions. We'll see if we can get some of your defenses operational."

Durand saluted, "Aye, aye, Commander!" Durand looked to her two standing men, "You heard the woman! Everybody pool magazines and grenades. Take a leak and a drink while you can. And if anyone wants a smoke, it's as good a time as any."

Jorge was standing out in the open with his M247HMG at the ready. Ashley was helping the marine on the right wall while Six helped defend the left and Shepard took position next to Durand. Shepard turned to her squad, "We don't let anyone of them get past these walls!" the team was ready, and Six was the first one to fire on the emerging rachni.

* * *

><p>The Illusive Man was watching Dot record the rachni assault occurring on Nepmos. "It's a shame we couldn't gain control over them. Outfitted correctly, even the geth would have difficulty fighting against them. However, I am concerned about these recent gaps in Dot updating us."<p>

The Director had the data in hand, "Yes well I'm sure Six has a few things she wanted to do without us watching over her. Attempt to put too many restraints on her and she might decide to break them all."

The Illusive Man understood, seeing what she was capable of, and knowing she and the Director were still holding a few cards back from him. "Just as long as she doesn't forget which side she's on."

"I can assure you, she will always be on humanity's side, Illusive Man. Its weather she will still view us on that side, if she were to ever discover our other projectsâ€|"

* * *

><p>Another wave of rachni were pushing their way from the tunnels, only for the slaughter fest that was waiting for them. Rocket support fire from the turret helped exuberantly to force the rachni to crossfire positions between the various soldiers waiting for them. With the fall of the last rachni and the seismic sensors clear, Durand folded her rifle and turned to Shepard, "Holy hell, ma'am. Talk about a near-run thing. You all right?"<p>

Shepard brushed off the sulfur that accumulated on her shoulders, "Never mind me. Are you alright?"

"Still on my feet. But we've been fighting for almost 26 hours straight. None of us will be standing for long. There's one other thing I should mention. One of our other listening posts went offline three days ago." Durand looked back to the pills of dead bugs, "I don't know if it's coincidence, a pirate raid, or what. But if you could check in on themâ€|"

"We'll check it out. I don't know why there are rachni loose out here, but I intend to find out."

Six and the marine she worked with walked over to Durand and Shepard, "Ma'am? We're getting a signal from one of the ground-scan UAVs. A big hollow space about five hundred meters under the surface."

Durand took a look at the readings herself, "Right. That must be it. That must be where they're coming from. My people aren't in any condition for a clearing operation, though."

"Just point us in the right direction."

"You don't have to do that, Commander. We've bled them. We can probably hold until a bigger ship arrives to get us offworld. If you want to take a throw at it, we'll give you the coordinates. But it's your call."

Shepard looked to the site, "We aren't leaving people behind." She tapped the side of her helmet, "Joker, lock onto our current position, we've got injured marines who need immediate pick up." Shepard paused as she looked to Jorge and Williams, "And tell Kaidan to suit up. Jorge, get ready to move out. Ash, Hâ€|Six," tempted to use her actual name, Shepard stopped herself since she has yet to reveal it to anyone else, "start getting the injured ready to evac."

Once the Normandy landed Garrus, O'Brien and Cortez were acting as sentries while Liara and Dr. Chakwas helped the injured. With the ship on the scene, Shepard detached the Mako from the turret generator as she, Kaidan and Jorge moved on to the potential nest the UAV ID'd.

Upon reaching the location they found something that would lead them directly to the hollow space. "A mine shaft, here? Something's not right, Commander."

"Agreed, Jorge." Shepard grabbed her shotgun, "Kaidan, we'll be fighting rachni. Assuming the hollow is going to be tight as I

imagine, your biotics should pack a major punch to them."

Kaidan readied his shotgun as well, "No offense Commander, but I think Liara or Wrex might be a bit more helpful than me in such conditions."

"I don't want Liara to be forced to remember what happened on Noveria. And I'm really not in the mood for an 'I told you so' speech from Wrex. Now let's move it out people!"

* * *

><p>As Durand and the rest of her unit were helped onto the Normandy, Six was messing with the seismic sensors, "Dot, could we extend the range of these sensors?"

"Not with your suit's current equipment. However I believe I could use _Normandy_'s sensors to help."

Six looked around, "Request permission. Then show me the results."

As she waited Joker contacted her, "_Uh, I don't know if you asked it, but your AI friend is asking me to let it use the Normandy's scanners._"

"I did. I want to make sure there aren't rachni pockets we might have missed."

Wrex walked out of the _Normandy_'s garage, "If you're planning a bug hunt, you aren't going without me."

"Count me in!" Williams walked up to her too with rifle at the ready.

O'Brien had his sniper rifle slung over his shoulder, "Someone's got to keep you two company while she runs in headfirst."

Dot finished her scans and displayed it onto the group's HUD. "I have detected two major seismic anomalies. The first is north-northeast of our current position, several hundred meters out. The other is northwest with roughly the same traveling distance."

"Then let's get started."

* * *

><p>Entering the mineshaft Shepard received a transmission from Six. "Commander, we've discovered a rachni attack site, along with a mining camp. The equipment comes from Tenkarra Mining Consortium, however the campsite suggests they had more equipment than currently present."

Shepard was staring at several rachni mounds within the room with a crate with the company logo on it. "Thanks for the heads up. I think I know where the rest of their gear went."

"_Understood. We're heading to another possible rachni ambush site to confirm._"

Kaidan turned to Shepard, "Did she just say 'ambush site'?"

Jorge opened the next door, "Six's a big girl. Besides, if she knows they're there, it's not much of an ambush." He was slow to enter as he spotted more crates and mounds. "Looks like we found bug central. Who get to kick the hornet nest first?"

Shepard took aim with shotgun in hand, "I've got point, just cover my flanks. Kaidan, get your biotics ready." Shepard slowly walked down one of the narrow paths checking her surroundings. Without warning a mound started forming before her as two rachni popped out of the dirt. Kaidan used his biotics to lift one of the rachni to render it incapable of combat as Jorge and Shepard killed the other. That just left the last one to deal with, simple enough as they continued to fire on it until it was dropped to the ground. "We can't let Six show us off, let hurry up and finish wiping out the rest of them."

* * *

><p>The Prophet of Pity and his geth didn't seem to take notice of the rather small opening within their defenses, though Rayta had to move the fleet precisely to keep the illusion of a 'perfect' defense grid. However discontent over the geth has spread far more deeply than the Fleet Master had realized.<p>

The Yanme'e viewed the geth as a new Huragok that could replace them and their niche within the Covenant should the machines be allowed to learn more about the ships and weapons, rendering them to be nothing more than aerial Unggoy. The Unggoy also had the same concerns as the Fleet Master, breaking their religious taboos, however even as a collective the Unggoy were too cowardly to speak out against the Prophet's will. The Kig-Yar were also starting to feel threatened by the geth, as the geth did not require sleep or food in order to function, could be deployed from any situation far faster than them, and their sensors could potentially eliminate the need for Kig-Yar search parties, eliminating all need of hiring the Kig-Yar. Though the Lekgolo have not shown it, even they could feel the encroachment of the geth, particularly the armature units. However their positions were safeguarded thanks to the need for Lekgolo colonies to control certain machinery and create Mgalekgolo for enclosed spaces that the armatures could not traverse.

As for the Sangheili, many were still in opposition of working with the geth, unfortunately a few were starting to embrace it. Unflinching, expendable, and durable, by some the geth were viewed as the greatest weapon the Covenant has ever acquired. The only commonality among the Sangheili who were prompting this idea was the fact that they have toured the Sovereign a few times now, and Shipmaster Ramo' Ranjamee was their biggest promoter. Rayta has been able to curb Ramo's attempts thus far, however he would eventually be given a chance to speak if Pity had any say about it.

* * *

><p>After about half an hour of carefully clearing out the tunnel, Shepard discovered rachni brood warriors. Given accounts from the Rachni Wars, the brood warriors would only fight when they were strained for warriors to defend the nest, suggesting that these rachni were completely eradicated from the planet.<p>

Durand and the survivors of the 14th Infantry Regiment were picked up by Alliance Command while the _Normandy_ continued to Altahe to investigate Listening Post Theta. Using the same technique Dot used to find the two other rachni attack sites on Nepmos, the _Normandy_ scanned the area near the Alliance base, discovering several surrounding the base and one a few hundred meters east. Unlike Nepmos, there were no survivors however they were about to triangulate the coordinates of the supply depot that send the unmanned supply ships to the two outposts within the past few days.

Reaching the supply depot, Six took lead on this one, killing the few rachni workers she could find, and nothing else. "Commander, something's wrong. This can't be it."

"Just keep your eyes and ears peeled for anything." Shepard also brought Wrex and Williams with her, knowing how tight the ship could be. Reaching the cockpit and crew quarters they found an active terminal next to an explosive device. Six activated the terminal, "_Personal data recorder for Major Elena Flores._"

"Play the first entry."

"_Sigma-23 is almost fully operation. The barracks and storage lockers are complete, and we've begun stocking the munitions. It's highly unlikely the Alliance will patrol in the nebula. I expect our only risk will be from pirates. And who'll believe them? Looks like we'll have space for two reinforced platoons of Cerberus commands._"

Williams spit, "Cerberus. Damn. We should have known." Six looked back to her. "That's right, you and the others weren't with us when we found them. You were talking with that big friend of yours. Well, all you need to know is that they're all a bunch of human extremists that give humanity a bad name."

Six knew all of this, more than she'd like to admit, though she continued to play dumb for the time being. Shepard took over on the terminal now, "Play the second entry."

"_The package arrived today for field testing. I'm told they're fundamentally similar to the units being developed on Noveria. They promise this batch will be stable. Something about them developing in proximity to the master control unit. We detected some pirates setting up an anchorage in a neighboring system. I think we'll try deploying them there first._"

"Play the last entry."

"_They've escaped containment. Clever bastards. We treated them like animals. We should've treated them like P.O.W.s. They're spreading. Boarding the supply ships and sending them to random destinations. They'll be all over the cluster in a week. General, if you recover this message, my advice is: screw the rachni. They're too smart. Use one of the other projects. Flores, signing offâ€| for the final time._"

Wrex was laughing to himself, "This is a familiar story. A failed experiment with the rachni. Nice to see humans are consistently stupid."

With the rest of the ship already explored Shepard armed the explosives with a seventy second countdown timer. Running back through the cargo area more rachni workers tried to impede them only for Six to stop them cold. Wrex wrestled down a rachni warrior long enough for Williams to use her shotgun and blast its head off. Thirty seconds still on the clock the team jumped into the _Normandy_'s airlock and dusted off before the ship exploded. With the four still in the airlock waiting for the pressurization, Joker looked back to how close the explosion was, "_Uh Commander, could you, I don't know, maybe set the timer to be a bit longer so we can be certain we can escape the blast?_"

* * *

><p>After that mission, Six pulled Dot from her helmet to privately talk about Cerberus and the rachni. "Are you kidding me?"<p>

Jorge turned to O'Brien, "Six jokes, but she never kids. Still," turning back to her, "I can't believe they did that. It's like ONI or the UNSC trying to control the Buggers."

"And ONI would probably be sending guys like us to clean up that mess. Now we have to find a way to sever Dot from the Director once and for all."

"I can't keep Dot out for too much longer. They might get suspicious." Six walked into the elevator, clearing her mind of their discussion and reinserting Dot.

Cortez then turned to Jorge, "You worked with Dot too, right? Do you have any idea how she might be able to break the chain of command with him?"

Jorge started rubbing the side of his helmet, thinking. "That's tough. DÃ©jÃ© never broke the chain of command either. With Six being the highest ranking member here, besides this Director fellow probably, maybe Six could order her to cut the ties. I doubt that'll work though without something for Dot to say he's no longer fit for duty."

* * *

><p>Just as Six finished tying Kameko back onto her armor, the elevator doors opened with Lamenting Light hovering in, "Ah, Reclaimer. Excellent timing. I was just about to seek you out. Were you going down?"<p>

Six really didn't want to deal with him right now. "No. I was just getting off."

"Apologies," Light then hovered out to allow Six out. "Reclaimer, I must ask you, why have you been avoiding me? The other Reclaimers are distant as well, however you go to greater lengths to avoid contact. Are you worried that I would interface with your Construct without permission? If that is the case I will simply avoid such interactions with your Construct unless permitted."

Six continued toward the mess, "That was part of it. The rest is a bit moreâ€¦complicated. I don't want to talk about it."

"Very well, Reclaimer. My only purposes now are to ensure my archives are safe and accessible to you when ever requested and to assist however I may."

* * *

><p>AN: **The roots of deceit have been planted, can the Covenant survive much longer under Pity and the geth? Personally I never liked how we help kill the rachni on Nepmos and just leave the marines to a possible rescue later. If the Normandy SR-2 can land on Ilium without any visible problems, then I think the Normandy SR-1 could have land on Nepmos, which has the save surface gravaty of 1.2 g(and how else does the Normandy pick up the Mako after every mission?).

37. Chapter 37

**A/N: **Before we hit Virmire we have one more stop to make.

* * *

><p>Just as Shepard was ready to travel to Virmire, she was interrupted by Joker, "Commander, incoming signal from Fifth Fleet HQ on the Citadel."

"_Commander Shepard. Something uncomfortable has just come up. In the First Contact War, we fired a lot of espionage probes into turian space. We've just received a 'mission complete' burst from one of them._"

"Where's it been in the meantime?"

"_No idea. Lost in transit. These probes were built in a hurry after first contact._"

Shepard knew there was going to be a downside if it came from the First Contact War, "What makes this 'uncomfortable'?"

"_When these probes were launched, we didn't have any idea who we were fighting. We didn't want to risk aliens examining our technology. The probe has a demo nuke built in. a twenty-kiloton tactical fusion warhead. About equal to the bomb dropped on Hiroshima back in the twentieth. If somebody finds that probe, tampers with itâ€"you don't need me to finish, Commander._"

"I understand this must be handled. But I don't have anyone trained to deal with this sort of thing, sir."

"_I know. I wouldn't ask if it wasn't important. These probes have been classified for twenty-six years. The Council would call fusion bomb booby traps 'dangerous and irresponsible.' The Alliance would face censure if they find this probe. I'm asking you because the Normandy can get on site quickly and quietly. It's in the Voyager Cluster._"

"It's in the Voyager Cluster? That's the opposite side of the Alliance from turian space. How did it get there?"

"_I don't know. It's possible someone recovered it safely and brought it there. It's also possible it got very badly lost. It could have been wandering the relay network since the war._"

"We'll get on it immediately, Admiral. And we'll be discreet."

"_I appreciate that, Commander. Good luck. Fifth Fleet out._"

With Admiral Hackett off, Shepard started thinking about Dot and Light. Shepard left the CIC to go look for Six. She found her and Light both in the mess hall. "Six can I have a word with you. Without Lightâ€|"

"Very well human, I will speak with the other Reclaimers for the time being."

After the elevator door shut, Shepard turned back to Six, "Say, can Dot disarm nuclear devices?"

"That would depend on the trigger mechanism and if I cannot interface with the device. I would only be able to provide technical support otherwise, if the timer permits."

Shepard nodded, "Alright. Then we need you to get ready. We have a twenty-kiloton bobby trap that we need to recover."

* * *

><p>After claiming two mineral deposits on Agebinium, Shepard drove the Mako right to the signal of the probe to a manmade structure.<p>

"Mineshaft?" Kaidan turned to Six, "That's the source of the signal?"

"Correct, Staff Lieutenant. The signal is being broadcasted deep within the shaft."

Garrus didn't like it either, "Suspicious."

"I agree. This thing didn't crash. Somebody moved it here."

Shepard knew the risk, but given the payload they were after, "There's a nuclear weapon down there. We can't abandon it. Just stay on guard."

The team readied their weapons as Six took point, "Affirmative."

Traveling into the shaft they found several crates and drilling equipment, enough to suggest recent activity, though the drills were cold to the touch. Six found a side shaft that lead to a small opening where the satellite was just lying there. Before the team could get closer explosions went off within the shaft, "That was a detonator, Commander."

Soon enough a hologram of a turian in combat armor appeared in front of the satellite. "_Shepard. At last._"

Six moved aside to allow Shepard to speak, "You have me at a

disadvantage."

"_You don't remember me. No matter. I remember you. I never forget anyone I've fought. My name is Elanos Haliat. I doubt you know it. Who do you think runs the Terminus Clans, Shepard? Hm? Thousands of pirates, slavers, criminals of every stripe?_"

"In most criminal organizations, it's the one who's recognized as the most successful."

"_That's correct. The one who kills the most men. Seizes the most ships. Pillages the most colonies. Seven years ago, I was the strongest. I used my influence to assemble a fleet. We would drive your kind out of the Verge._"

Shepard looked at him with contempt, "You're the one behind the attack on Elysium!"

Elanos pointed his talons to himself, "_I was the motivator. The instigator. The one who promised glory and riches for sacking the largest human colony in the cluster. The one blamed when it failed. Failed because of you. Your damnable holding action._"

Six turned to Shepard, using the private comms Dot informed her, "Lieutenant Commander, the ore within this mine is laced with heavy metal. Our suit transmitters are not powerful enough to communicate to the _Normandy_."

She turned back to Elanos' hologram, "We'll find a way out of here."

"_I rather doubt that. Goodbye, Shepard._"

With Elanos' hologram deactivated, Garrus looked around, "Orders, Shepard?"

"We've got air and light, and the Normandy's still in orbit. Let's look for another way out."

Before she could do that, Dot quickly shouted, "Lieutenant, remote signal detected. The warhead has been armed. Please insert me so I may disarm it." Six quickly pulled Dot from her helmet and inserted her into the OSD slot on the satellite. The timer was already down to seven seconds when Dot was inserted. Now all they could do was wait and see. These were a rather intense few seconds with no clue on how Dot was progressing. The timer came to a sudden stop at two seconds as Dot's signature grid squares appeared on the surviving monitors. Six pulled Dot's chip and reinserted her into her helmet. "Medium Fusion Destructive Device successfully disarmed."

"Medium Fusion?"

"Yes, Staff Lieutenant. A UNSC tactical nuclear weapon with a yield of only sixty-three terajoules. Roughly equivalent to this nuclear device."

Before the question could be asked, Six started to walk back up the shaft as she replied to the unspoken question, "The most powerful is the NOVA. But if you want a measurable device, then we have HAVOK warheads, each with a yield of thirty megatons. Our war with the

Covenant has always been one-sided, in their favor."

The tunnel they came through was completely caved in with no way to move all of the rocks blocking their path. As Six looked around she noticed the other door that was locked before was unlocked now. Following it she found a tunnel that led up.

* * *

><p>The shaft led them back to the surface, and to a rather nicely elevated location where they had the perfect vantage point over Elanos Haliat and his men. They had moved the Mako to this campsite, probably expecting to use it as an ambush against the Normandy. Six threw her hand out to Kaidan, "Sniper rifle."

After Kaidan handed it to her, she had the sniper and her DMR placed into the sand for support. She was using her helmet's 'eye' and camera to target Elanos with both weapons. Shepard and Garrus grabbed their sniper rifles as they got ready for the shooting gallery to begin, both targeting snipers on the ground, "Fire at your discretion."

Six took a moment to make finally adjustments before she fired the sniper rifle first. The shot disrupted Elanos' kinetic barrier and everyone down there started grabbing their weapons trying to find where the shot came from. Six quickly fired a single shot from her DMR, piercing his skull and killing him before the turian realized his revenge had failed. With their leader dead, the mercenaries opened fire where they thought the shots came from. Shepard, Garrus and Six took out the remaining mercs one by one, never giving them the chance to surrender.

* * *

><p>Back on the Normandy, Shepard had Six talk with her privately in her quarters. "Since you told me about your past Hitomi, I guess I should tell you some of mine, seeing how some of it was flushed out today."

Six already had Dot pulled out of her helmet, and little Kameko dangling on her armor, "You don't have to ma'am. The turian was a pirate. His death ended that."

"I know. But with how much you've opened to me, I should at least do the same, or at least something." Shepard pulled over a picture she had on her desk, "I never grew up on a single planet. We were always shifting from ship to ship. My parents have been with the Alliance for as long as I can remember and I've followed their footsteps. Seven years ago, I was on shore leave on Elysium when the Blitz happened. Lead by the batarians, it was a full on invasion of pirates, slavers and other criminal organizations in an attempt to wipe out the colony. I got the civilians and surviving Alliance marines to hold out until Alliance reinforcements could arrive. It was a bloody battle, hell one of our flanks broke and I had to hold them off alone while I ordered the others to bolster other areas of our defense line that might have broken. I was regarded as a hero, but really I was just doing what anyone would have at the time. So I doubt I'll ever be able to understand some of the pain you've been through." She placed the picture back down, showing that it was her

when she was younger with both of her parents.

Six looked to the image, remembering the few happy memories she still had of her parents, then to the training she underwent. "As you said, you were only doing your duty as a soldier; protecting humanity at any cost."

Shepard turned to her, "Hitomi, I don't know how those guys trained you, but that's not a soldier's duty. Yes, a soldier protects humanity, but we are humans as well. We fight so that others don't have to. It's our choice to defend them, but not at the cost of our own humanity. Could you at least start believing that yourself?"

Six wasn't as confident in such a belief, having been trained to sacrifice herself if it meant achieving her objective and saving lives. "I'll try ma'am."

"Hitomi, you don't have to be so formal. You could call me Commander or Shepard, you know."

Six pulled out Dot's chip to reinsert, "I'll work on that as well, ma'am."

* * *

><p>Reaching Hoc, Joker stopped the Normandy once the sensors picked up several unidentified crafts orbiting the planet. "Uh, Commander?"

Shepard had Six, Jorge, Cortez, O'Brien and Sork brought to the CIC to review this new development. Seeing the ships and their formations, O'Brien threw his arms into the air, "We're fucked."

Jorge started ID'ing the various ships, "A supercarrier, two destroyers and a battlecruiser!"

"Like I said, fucked."

Shepard was surprised at the scale of the vessels, though she noticed three smaller ships Jorge hadn't ID'ed, "What about these?"

Sork turned his head so his good eye could see where she was pointing. "Agricultural ships. They are likely using their sensors to help with patrols. Nothing more. This is the fleet in its entirety."

"We still have the stealth system. We should be able to get past them undetected."

Cortez turned to Pressly, "Wouldn't work. Your stealth system only masks your heat signature. Without a way to make the ship invisible as well, we'd be shot down the moment we were within visual range."

Shepard remembered the gun controls from the corvette as they were moving toward the bridge. "There has to be a way. Entering atmo on the other side of the planet and flying around?"

"We would only make ourselves a bigger target." Sork moved up and

enlarged the planet as he placed markers on a few locations, "The geth have installed a number of anti-air towers around the facility. It's possible they have more since I last saw them."

Dot finally spoke after analyzing Covenant movement. "Lieutenant Commander, I have detected an anomaly in Covenant fleet movement." Six waited for Sork to move aside as she inserted Dot into the holographic interface. "Fleet movements seem to suggest a very limited window of opportunity for a vessel of our size to slip through."

Sork examined the pattern now. "I seeâ€|" He walked away, "The Fleet Master has prepared for our arrival and has given us our path to Saren and his geth. Humans, prepare for the most intense fight in your lives. The time to silence the heresy of Saren and Pity has come."

* * *

><p>Expecting the worst, Shepard had Tali, Garrus, Six and O'Brien prepped to take out the AA guns. "Commander, I'm starting to pick up a faint signal. It looks like it might be our salarian infiltration team." The Normandy flew in low as the Mako rolled out, touching down in the shallow water. "_We've got a clean drop, Commander._"

"Stay out of range and continue evasive maneuvers until we bring those AA towers down."

"_I know the drill. Meet you at the camp once those towers are offline. Joker out._"

O'Brien looked at the serene scenery, "Nice beach. Too bad it's gonna get bloody."

* * *

><p>Raja found Rayta overlooking a hologram of the planet on the bridge of Unending Resolve. Raja waited for Rayta to acknowledge his presence, saluting to him, "Fleet Master, I have received reports from the geth, they have engaged unknown foes on the southern perimeter of the facility. They are taking out the AA towers along the way to the wall."

Rayta magnified the hologram to the region Raja spoke of. "So it has begun. The confrontation."

"Fleet Master?"

"Have all of our forces on standby. And I want as many geth off of our ships to help 'defend' Saren's facility."

Raja bowed his head, "I will see to it all geth are off our ships." Rayta started to wonder if Pity will order forces to help defend the compound, or if he can avoid that.

* * *

><p>After disabling the two AA towers, the Normandy was at the salarian base camp, and it seemed to only have bad news waiting

for them. Williams and Alenko were already talking with the captain of the salarians when Shepard arrived. "So what are we supposed to do now?"

The green scaled salarian in white armor calmly told Williams, "Stay put until we can come up with a plan."

Shepard turned to the green scaled salarian, "Are you in charge here? What's the situation?"

"I'm Captain Kirrahe, Third Infiltration Regiment STG. You and your crew have just landed in the middle of a hotzone. Every AA gun within ten miles has been alerted to your presence."

"What are we supposed to do in the meantime?"

Kirrahe looked around, "We stay put until the Council sends the reinforcements we requested."

Alenko looked to him with some unfortunate facts, "We are the reinforcements."

"What? You're all they sent? I told the Council to send a dozen fleets."

"We couldn't understand your transmission. They sent me to investigate."

Kirrahe was slightly annoyed by such incompetence, "That is a repetition of our task. I lost more than half of my men investigating this place."

Before Kaidan could ask for more information, one of the salarian soldiers started shouting, "We've got a cloaker!"

Six walked over, disarming one of the salarians, "He's not here to fight you."

Kirrahe grabbed a pistol, "Commander, tell your people to stand down and let us kill it!"

Jorge grabbed one of the salarians, forcing him to drop his weapon, "I wouldn't point a gun at her."

Shepard turned back to Kirrahe, "I'm sorry Captain, but your people will need to stand down." Sork deactivated his active camo, presenting himself to the salarians as he lowered himself to his knee. "He's not with them anymore."

"A defector?"

Shepard looked to Sork, "Something like that."

Kirrahe slowly put away the pistol as he signaled his men to stand down, "Do you know anything about them?"

O'Brien walked over, "What? You mean about the split-lips, or the Covies?"

"Nicknames? So you had intel on them already?"

Cortez interrupted, "Enough. So what else have you found about the facility?"

Kirrahe was uneasy about having lost men to learn about them for nothing, but he knew they had gathered valuable information. "Saren's base of operation. He's set up a research facility here, but it's crawling with geth and very well fortified."

Shepard was concerned by the amount of fortification they have both on and above the planet. "What's Saren researching?"

"He's using the facility to breed an army of krogan."

"How is that possible?" Wrex overheard Kirrahe and walked to them.

"Apparently, Saren has discovered a cure for the genophage."

Shepard started to shake her head, "The geth are bad enough. But a krogan army—he'd be almost unstoppable."

Kirrahe nodded, "Exactly my thoughts. We must ensure that this facility and its secrets are destroyed."

"Destroyed?" Wrex stopped that train of thought, "I don't think so. Our people are dying. This cure can save them."

Kirrahe wasn't going to allow it. "If that cure leaves this planet, the krogan will become unstoppable. We can't make the same mistake again."

Wrex walked up to the salarian, forcing Kirrahe to lean back to accommodate Wrex's advance, "We are not a mistake!"

With Wrex stomping away in anger, Kirrahe continued to keep an eye on him, "Is he going to be a problem? We already have enough angry krogan to deal with."

Shepard nodded, "He'll be fine. I'll talk to him."

"I'd appreciate that, Commander. My men and I need to rethink our plan of attack. Can you give us some time?"

Cortez looked around the campsite, "With what little we have, I think you'll need some help with planning the attack."

Kirrahe knew the value of intel, "The more information the better." Before he and Cortez walked into the tent, Kirrahe turned back to Shepard, "We won't be long, Commander. In the meantime, if you need any supplies you can talk to Commander Rentola. He's in one of the tents nearby."

With Cortez and Kirrahe gone, Kaidan crossed his arms, "Looks like things are a bit of a mess."

"I wouldn't be so worried if it wasn't for Wrex. He looks like he's going to blow a gasket."

Shepard turned to Williams, "Just drop it. He'll be fine."

"If you say so. But I'm gonna keep my eye on him, if it's all the same to you."

Sork walked to Tali, ensure her safety and keeping his eye on the salarians around them, Jorge was making sure his HMG was ready for all of the saltwater and wasn't going to jam on him. Six grabbed O'Brien to barrow his sniper rifle, she didn't like the look on Wrex either, uncertain if his concern for his people might blind him to their goals. Six wasn't going to take any chances with him though. She found a rather secluded spot, not easily seen unless one was trying to look, and even when Shepard should engage in a conversation with the krogan battlemaster, she won't be any danger of getting hit.

* * *

><p>AN: **Too bad no one kept Kirrahe in the loop about him.

38. Chapter 38

**A/N: **A special update this time around broken up into 3 parts. And sorry to those who jumped to the last page without noticing these two.

* * *

><p>As Cortez helped plan the assault on Saren's base, Shepard walked up to Wrex. The angered krogan was firing his shotgun into the water, trying to blow off the frustration, but it wasn't helping enough. He stopped when he noticed Shepard's advance, "This isn't right, Shepard. If there's a cure for the genophage, we can't destroy it."<p>

"I understand you're upset. But we both know Saren's the enemy here. He's the one you should be angry with."

Wrex closed the gap between him and her, "Really? Saren created a cure for my people. You want to destroy it. Help me out here, Shepard. The lines between friend and foe are getting a little blurry from where I stand."

Shepard tried making him see reason, "This isn't a cure, it's a weapon. And if Saren is allowed to use it, you won't be around to reap the benefits. None of us will."

"That's a chance we should be willing to take. This is the fate of my entire people we're talking about," his face now in hers, "I've been loyal to you so far. Hell, you did more for me than my family ever did. But if I'm going to keep following you, I need to know we're doing it for the right reasons," pulling his shotgun on her as Shepard aimed a pistol to his head.

"Wrex, these krogan are not your people. They're slaves of Saren. Tools. Is that what you want for them?"

Shepard lowered her weapon for a moment, trying to show Wrex she doesn't want to pull the trigger against him. Wrex though was

conflicted, thinking for several seconds about what she just said. "No. we were tools for the Council once. To thank us for wiping out the rachni, they neutered us all. I doubt Saren will be as generous." Wrex paused again, uncertain until he was the one to disarm first. "All right, Shepard. You've made your point. I don't like this, but I trust you enough to follow your lead. Just one thing. When we find Saren, I want his head."

From the tent Cortez and Sork walked out with Kirrahe. Six was also walked back toward them, from the direction of the Mako, with O'Brien's sniper rifle in hand, something Shepard could guess as to why she had it though she was a bit more curious as to why Sork was in the tent. Kirrahe greeted Shepard, "Thank you for speaking with the krogan. The assault on Saren's base will be difficult enough as it is."

Shepard turned to them, "I'll assume that means you've come up with a plan."

"Of sorts." Kirrahe looked to Sork, "I have men salvaging our crashed ship so we can convert the drive system into a twenty-kiloton ordnance. Crude, but effective."

Ashley smiled, "Nice. Drop that nuke from orbit and Saren can kiss his turian ass goodbye."

Cortez stopped her, "From Sork and Kirrahe's intel, the facility is too well-fortified for that. We'd barely scratch the facility. We'll need to place the bomb within
>the facility to take it out."<p>

Shepard turned to Kirrahe, "Where do we take the nuke? And how do we get there?"

"The bomb must be taken to the far side of the facility. Your ship can drop it off, but we'll need to infiltrate the base, disable the AA guns, and pacify any ground forces first."

"You want us to go in on foot? We don't have enough men."

Cortez quickly tried to ease Kaidan, "If we had HEVs we'd be able to disrupt them far more effective, but we still have a few options."

Kirrahe nodded, "We've made a work around for that. I'm going to divide my men into three teams and hit the front of the facility. While we've got their attention, you can sneak your 'shadow' team in the back."

Six joined the conversation, "I'll assist in the frontal assault, Commander."

Cortez started shaking his head, "Sorry Six. Don't get me wrong, but you would be invaluable in the distraction, but we need you apart of the infiltration team. Sork has given us information to suggest Saren has another beacon recovered by the Covenant. We'll need you to take the beacon's vision so we know what he's truly planning."

Shepard placed a hand on her shoulder, "Don't worry Six, you're still needed." Shepard turned back to Kirrahe, "It's a good idea, overall,

but your people are going to get slaughtered."

Cortez raised his SMG, "Don't worry about them. O'Brien, Jorge and I will be with them."

Kirrahe nodded, "Indeed. We're also tougher than we look, Commander. But it's true. I don't expect many of us will make it out alive. And that makes what we're going to ask even more difficult. We need one of your men to accompany us. To help coordinate the teams."

Shepard agreed, "We'll need someone who knows Alliance communication protocols."

"I volunteer, Commander."

Williams stopped Alenko, "Not so fast, LT. Commander Shepard will need you to arm the nuke. I'll go with the salarians."

"With all due respect, Gunnery Chief, it's not your place to decide."

"Why is it that when someone says 'with all due respect' they really mean 'kiss my ass'?"

Shepard was tempted to have them shut up, but instead she turned to Kirrahe, "Who would be better suited to the mission?"

Kirrahe looked to both, "Either of these two will do, Commander. Both seem willing to sacrifice their lives if necessary, though if we are lucky, such sacrifices won't be required."

Shepard looked back, "Williams, you'll accompany the captain. No heroics, understood?"

"Aye, aye, Commander!"

"I'll have the ordinance loaded onto the Normandy and brief your crew on its detonation sequencing. Do you have any questions before we go, Commander?"

* * *

><p>With everything set, Shepard, Six, Sork, Tali and Wrex moved in. "Comm check. Do you read me, Commander?"

"Loud and clear."

"_Good. We'll start our push. We'll try to make it to the AA guns, but it might be up to you to finish the job. And Commander? If you see any way to undermine their defenses, we could definitely use the help._" Six pushed on ahead as the others were close behind her. "_Shadow is on the ground. Repeat: Shadow is on the ground. Chief Williams, with Aegohr team! Cortez and Terra team, Mannovai, Jaeto teams, move! Time to get some attention!_"

Sork reached to Six and stopped her. He pointed off ahead, "A geth outpost. One of their targeting arrays." Sork disappeared once more, hopping from sand banks and rocks to keep his illusion from breaking. Six spotted a geth on patrol and opened fire. She downed it before it could get a beat on her, but soon the geth from the outpost were

targeting her.

Shepard was helping her, taking out a geth sniper with her own sniper rifle before Wrex moved in to get better use of his shotgun. "_Mannovai is under coordinated crossfire. O'Brien, see if you can't find any long-range turrets helping the geth target!_"

Tali was able to hack the systems of a geth destroyer long enough to have it destroy another sniper hiding on the upper level and for Wrex to blast it to pieces. Sork finished dealing with a trooper as he reappeared before them. "Saren said something about the geth having a perfect network thanks to these arrays."

Tali took a look at the systems, "That would make sense. If the geth were using these towers to help with their targeting, then maybeâ€|"

The tower was shut down as the team picked up a transmission from Kirrahe, "_Something scrambled their targeting. We've got a shot! Chief Williams, take the heat off Mannovai!_"

Sork nodded and pointed on, "We are not far from the outer wall. Another outpost and a series of walkways are all that stand between us and the facility."

"Good," Wrex reloaded his shotgun, "I'm gonna tear this place a new one!"

* * *

><p>O'Brien was keeping his distance and providing fire support as Cortez and Jorge were pushing in deeper. "Watch it Cortez, you've got Covies buzzing in."<p>

Drones were swarming the skies as Jackals were trying to pin them down with sniper fire. O'Brien was dealing with the snipers, freeing Cortez to handle the bugs. Jorge was plowing through the geth, "Come on, this isn't even fair now. The geth are just lining up for the scrap heap."

O'Brien activated his helmet's VISR to check on any potential active camo users, despite the brightness of the day. After a few moments to wait for his HUD to readjust the brightness he spotted two, "Ah crap. Cortez, eleven o'clock. Jorge, three. You got active camo users."

* * *

><p>The Prophet of Pity had requested the Fleet Master to his quarters. Kneeling down before him, Rayta humbled himself in his presence, "You have summoned for me, my Prophet?"<p>

"Yesâ€|I have been informed about an assault on Saren's facility. The salarians seemed to making a desperate attack against himâ€| Do we have any of our forces down there?"

"Some, my Prophet. They are already attempting to assist as we speak."

"Goodâ€|goodâ€|We need to send more though. Send
â€|scaraaabbâ€|"

"My Prophet?" The geth were not allowing Rayta to get any closer than he already was. Though Pity himself was not looking to Rayta at all. His chair turned away from him. "Prophet of Pity what is the matter?"

"Send moreâ€¦|sendâ€¦|we must defend this facilityâ€¦|"

Rayta finally had enough of these geth, knowing something was wrong with the Prophet, he struck out against the geth. Grabbing the two he crushed their arms before tossing them down and crushing the rest of their bodies with his hooves. Drawing out his energy swords, he sliced the energy staves before cutting the last two in half. Turning the Prophet's gravity throne Rayta found a ghastly site. He turned the Prophet's thrown back to how it was when his men arrived. Finding the destroyed geth they turned to Rayta, "Fleet Master, what has happened?"

"I want every monitor, every member of our fleet to hear and see this. And order Raja to commence with the cleansing."

* * *

><p>Six destroyed a satellite the geth were using for orbital bombardment and the team eliminated a group of geth flyers at a refueling station. Before actually hitting the facility's final outer defenses images of a gold armored Sangheili appeared across the facility. Sork immediately recognized him, "Fleet Master Raytaâ€¦| "<p>

"_My fellow brothers, heed me! Saren and his allies are our enemies!_"

He grabbed the gravity throne next to him and turned it, revealing a Prophet with several visible implants on his face, barely able to think for himself. "_Defendâ€¦|defend the f-facilityâ€¦|_" drool was dripping from his mouth, as he could barely hold his head up.

"_Look at what he and his geth have done? They promised to help find our gods, and instead they have attempted to manipulate us with this puppet!_" Rayta activated his energy sword, and as a mercy, killed the drooling Prophet. "_Destroy them! Destroy them all!_"

* * *

><p>Throughout the fleet and the facility on Virmire, Covenant forces began eliminating the geth and any other who would fight with them. This also meant a temporary truce with the humans and salarians, and even they were starting to aid in their revolt. O'Brien started to move up, "Well what do you know, looks like we didn't need Tinker Bell after all. They collapsed themselves."<p>

"Sorry O'Brien, but we still need him. Once we wipe out the facility, who do you think they'll turn to attack next?"

Jorge grabbed a grenade from one of the geth, "Then let's pop this facility and get that plan of your in gear before they decide to cut our heads off."

Cortez nodded, "Captain, Williams, all teams, Covenant forces are

temporary allies. Try not to shot at them unless they show aggression towards you. We might actually pull this off after all."

* * *

><p>Mgalekgolo bond brothers blasted a wall out with their assault cannons, their shields negating the geth weaponry as they push forward. From the smoke a Skirmisher rushed out, knocking one of the geth down before using an overcharged Plasma Pistol to overload it. A geth juggernaut attempted to stop him, only for an energy sword to be stabbed through its back. The Sangheili Spec Op deactivated his active camo before leading a charge against krogan clones attempting to stop them.<p>

* * *

><p>Within the facility it was utter chaos as Shadow team easily snuck into the base without much worry. Going through a sewage system, they found "Salarians?"<p>

The moment the salarians spotted them they opened fire. They were only armed with cheap pistols and no armor or kinetic barriers to speak of. After they were all killed, Wrex felt something was wrong here. "What else's going on in this place?"

Continuing up the stairs, Tali started to access a terminal next to the door. "We've got access to base security. We can cut the alarms from here. Maybe even trigger alarms on the far side of the base. It'll clear the guards out for us, but they might be too much for the salarian teams to handle."

Shepard turned to Six before she looked back to Tali, "Just disable the alarms. We can handle any guards inside."

Sork moved ahead of the team, discovering two more salarians just standing around, similar to the others. Sork grabbed the two, crushing their skulls and tossing them aside. With the area clear the team continued and found containment cells with salarians wildly screaming or quietly mumbling to themselves. As they past one of the cells one of the salarians slammed his fists against the window, "What do you want? I told you everything! Iâ€" The salarian quickly noticed they weren't geth or asari, "Who are you? Alliance, right? I knew someone would come. They tried to break me, but they couldn't! I shut it out!"

Shepard couldn't understand a word the hyped salarian was saying, "Slow down, I need to know where you came from."

Nervous and twitching the salarian saluted, "Private Menos Avot of the Third Infiltration Regiment STG, sir! Captured while on reconnaissance six days ago. Glad to answer, sir!" He started to look around quickly, "Never any questions from these bastards. Just whispers and poking and cutting. I'd have said anything to get out and get some payback. That's not too much to ask, is it? A little payback?"

With Sork invisible again, Shepard turned back to the salarian, "What did they do to you, soldier?"

"Experiments, but I don't know what for. The effect of incessant

whispering on my shortening temper? Who knows? I just need out."

Wrex didn't like this. "Something's not right here, Shepard. I've tortured salarians before, they don't end up like this."

Six agreed, "Setting him free could endanger the mission, ma'am."

"No!" Soon realizing how desperate he seemed, Avot calmed down slightly, "No, I need to get out. This room is too small and it keeps talking and I really want to get out of here and get some work done. I need to get out. Let me out."

Six wasn't willing to do it, "Commander, we can't take that chance."

"Can't take that chance—no chance. I need to do what it says. I have to. Let me out." The salarian finally snapped, rushing at the door, "Let me out! Let me out! Let me out!" slamming his face against the glass and nearly fracturing his skull open.

Continuing to the next room they found two more salarians guarding the elevator. Six killed the first as Wrex took out the second. Continuing Kirrahe came on the comm again, "_Give a little ground, Williams. We don't want them to bunker-up. Draw them out._"

Sork however walked past the elevator and opened a door beside it. "Sork, where are you going?"

"I can smell more of the amphibians."

Shepard and Six were hesitant to follow, but as they did the door led out to a small walkway down to another door where Sork was already opening it. Inside the room he had discovered more salarians in cells.

One of the salarians was isolated when he saw them enter, "Well, you're not a geth. And you're not wearing a lab coat. So other than your mandible-faced friend, I guess I'm glad to see you. Lieutenant Ganto Imness of the Third Infiltration Regiment, captured during recon. I assume the fleet was called in to destroy the base?"

Shepard regretfully shook her head, "The transmission wasn't clear. The fleet is not coming."

"I see." Ganto calmly nodded, "Then you must be the infiltration team. I know the captain. He will want this facility destroyed." Ganto turned to look at the cells next to him, "My team was altered, indoctrinated. We knew about the breeding grounds. But the indoctrination is a greater threat, and far more horrifying. I watched good people reduced to mindless husks. There wasn't anything left. Others died during the experiments. I envy them."

Shepard looked to the other cells, "Do you know anything about the experiments they were conducting?"

"They were studying indoctrination. Symptoms, progress. Saren uses it to control his people, but I don't think he fully understands it. I

don't know much else. I just saw what it did to the others," pointing to his right with a cell full of drooling salarians, "Turned them into empty husks. I can't end up like that. Please-let me out!" unlike Menos, Ganto seemed rather sound of mind.

Shepard moved closer to the cell controls, "I'm opening your cell, but then you're on your own."

"Don't look back and hope to outrun the blast, hmm? A better chance than I had before you showed up." With the door open, Ganto walked away, "Thank you, human. And good luck. You'll need it."

Six walked over to the others as Tali and Wrex were also looking. Tali was disturbed by the sight, "These look docile. Their minds are gone."

Even Wrex was appalled, "This is no way to treat a prisoner. Kill them, sure, but to leave them like thisâ€¦"

Shepard looked, as each of the salarians in the cell could barely stand let alone walk. "Better to die than to live like this."

Tali agreed, "It's all we can do for them."

Shepard grabbed her pistol as she opened the cell. Tali turned away from the sight before Shepard and Six gave them painless death with a slug in their heads.

39. Chapter 39

**A/N: **Part 2 of 3

* * *

><p>Continuing to the upper level, the elevator opened to a husk contained within an unusual device. Six spotted an asari scientist and a krogan working diligently on something. She signaled to Shepard that she also saw at least three more husks also hooked up to other strange devices.<p>

Six rolled a frag grenade over to one of the husks as Shepard was placing another on the first device. Before she could finish the field containing the husk deactivated as it looked down to her. Six opened fire on the think, putting it down before it could discharge itself. The asari heard the shots, grabbing an assault rifle, "Intruders! Get the guards!"

Shepard grabbed her pistol and shot at the frag grenade Six rolled out, destroying the next husk before it was freed. The krogan turned, grabbing a pistol on his desk, "What is going on here? Where are the guards? Where is Saren?" Wrex threw his biotics, knocking the asari back to one of the tables as Tali helped keep the husks off the team. When the krogan saw Shepard, he rushed over, "No! Stay back! This is important work! This is the glorious salvation of my species! You will not destroy the work we have started!"

Six jumped onto the table the asari was on, using her to block the krogan's pistol shots before jumping over behind him. Six pulled out Emile's kukri as she started to slash and jab the krogan in his more

vulnerable areas: armpits, elbows, other major joint regions where his body's natural armor plating was weaker. Though they weren't exactly effective, they were able to help her when the krogan turned to her trying to punch her. She caught the punch with her free hand, besting the krogan in raw power. The krogan attempted to smash his pistol against her helmet, but Six already saw his arm in motion, dropping the kukri to catch his hand. Six then kicked the krogan in the quad, forcing the krogan down to his knees. Without mercy, she pulled out her pistol and rapidly fired eight rounds into his face at pointblank range.

Six started to wipe the orange blood off against the krogan corpse as Wrex looked to one of the terminals. He then turned to Six, "Say, can't your friend extract the data here?"

"Wrexâ€¦"

He turned back to Shepard, "I know. But if we couldâ€¦"

Six felt somewhat sympathetic to the krogan, seeing how far this fellow she just killed was willing to go to cure it. Six pulled Dot out of her helmet and inserted her into one of the active terminals. "Access achieved."

"What's the cure to the genophage?"

"There is no relevant data, Noble Six. The data here suggests they were using genetic samples from over a thousand different specimens and Doctor Droyas to create clones."

"Clones?" Wrex turned to the terminal, "You meanâ€¦it's not a real cure?"

"Correct. These files indicate Saren had no intention of curing the genophage in the long term. Rather he gave Doctor Droyas resources in an attempt to find it and in the meantime he was developing cloned specimens from over a thousand genetic donors to display proof of his 'success' to the krogan people. However Doctor Droyas has only been marginally successful, with an average of 3.31% fertility increase in test subjects."

Wrex was furious now, clenching his shotgun, he really wanted to shot something now. Six quickly pulled Dot from the computer before Wrex blasted it to pieces. She turned to him, almost ready to hit him for almost destroying Dot, though Six could feel that he was waiting for Dot to get out before he did destroy it.

Wrex was stomping out of the room, continuing on alone. Shepard turned to Six, "Did she actually download any of that?"

"No. I pulled her out before she could."

Shepard nodded, trying to catch up with Wrex. They found he had already destroyed a pair of geth guarding a door, just a few more things to help vent his frustration. With everyone there Wrex opened the door and found another asari as she was hiding under a desk. She slowly raised herself with her hands in the air, "Don't shoot! Please, I just want to get out of here before it's too late."

Shepard moved up front, "I'm not going to hurt you. Who are you?"

Wrex and Six were slow to lower their weapons, but eventually the two did, giving the asari the chance to get closer to explain, "Rana Thanoptis, neurospecialist. But this job isn't worth dying over. Or worse. You think the indoctrination only affects prisoners? Sooner or later, Saren will want to dissect my brain, too!"

Wrex still had a hand on his shotgun, "Give us one good reason we should help you, bitch."

Rana was nervous, seeing Wrex aim his shotgun at her, "I can help you! This elevator behind me goes to Saren's private lab. I can get you in." She quickly walked over to the elevator, inputting the access code to unlock it. "See? Full access. All of Saren's private files. Are we good? Can I go?"

Shepard wanted more details on what had happened to the salarians. "What were you studying?"

"It's that ship, Sovereign. It emits some kind of signal. Undetectable, but it's there. I've seen the effects. Saren uses it to influence his followers, to control them. It's called indoctrination. Direct exposure to the signal turns you into a mindless slave, like the salarian test subjects. But there's collateral damage, too."

Sork deactivated his cloak, "What do you mean by 'collateral damage'?"

Rana was even more fearful now that he had appeared, collapsing to her knees as she couldn't move, possibly seeing the revolt of the Covenant on her terminal. Her omni-tool activated so she could understand what he had said. Slow to return to her feet, Rana stuttered for a moment, "S-S-Sovereign's signal is too strong. Spend too much time near the ship and you feel it. Like a tingle at the back of your skull. It's like a whisper you can't quite hear. You're compelled to do things but you don't know why. You just obey. Eventually, you just stop thinking for yourself. It happens to everyone at the facility. My first test subject was the man I replaced. Now I just want to get out of here before it happens to me."

Sork walked closer to her, demanding, "Tell me more about this signal!"

Rana read the translation as Sork's hand was wrapped around her neck. "Signal's not exactly the right word. There's some kind of energy field emanating from the ship. It changes thought patterns. Over time—days, maybe a week—it weakens your will. You become easier to manipulate and control. But it's a degenerative condition. There's a balance between control and usefulness. The less freedom a subject maintains, the less capable it becomes."

Shepard looked to Six, "Why is Saren researching this? Isn't he the one controlling it?"

Rana's eyes diverted away from Sork, "The signal comes from the ship. It makes us obey Saren, but I don't think he controls it. Not

exactly. I thinkâ€|he's scared it might be affecting him. Indoctrination is subtle. By the time the effects become noticeable, it's usually too late."

Shepard raised her hand at Sork to release Thanoptis. "I'm going to blow this place to hell and gone. If you want to make it out alive, you'd better start running."

"What? You can'tâ€|but I'll neverâ€|" Rana started screaming as she ran past them.

Wrex turned to Shepard with a smile, "I like the way you think, Shepard."

Shepard turned to Sork, "Hold down the fort here. Don't let anyone box us in." Sork bowed his head, activating his active camo to wait, "Six, let's see if we can't find that beacon he was talking about."

The team continued to Saren's private area hoping to find anything, though more hopeful of finding the beacon that could fill in the missing pieces of the vision. Reaching an isolated part of tower, they found another Prothean beacon, just as they were promised. Six was slow to activate it, remembering the one that knocked her out back on Eden Prime. Unlike that one though, some of the holographic displays were still visible, with what appeared to be hand panels to begin the process. She slowly raised her hands over both before the beacon grabbed her and lifted her into the air. At first she struggled against the forced information pouring into her mind, but eventually her fist loosened up as she allowed herself to be infused with the information. What felt like minutes to Six was actually seconds to the others before she was dropped down to the floor.

Shepard helped Six to her feet as they walked up the ramp to leave. Before they could enter the elevator a hologram appeared behind them. Wrex looked at the ominously red image, "I get the feeling something bad is about to happen."

"_You are not Saren._"

The hologram was that of Sovereign, Saren's ship. "What is that? Some kind of VI interface?"

"_Rudimentary creatures of blood and flesh. You touch my mind, fumbling in ignorance, incapable of understanding._"

Shepard was letting Six lean against her as she turned to Tali, "I don't think this is a VI."

"_There is a realm of existence so far beyond your own you cannot even imagine it. I am beyond your comprehension. I am Sovereign!_"

Six quickly realized the meaning behind the visions she has been suffering through and what this hologram truly represented. "Sovereign isn't a Reaper shipâ€|it is a Reaper!"

"_Reaper? A label created by the Protheans to give voice to their destruction. In the end, what they chose to call us is irrelevant. We

simply are._"

Tali couldn't understand or believe it, "The Protheans vanished fifty thousand years ago. You couldn't have been there. It's impossible!"

"_Organic life is nothing but a genetic mutation, an accident. Your lives are measured in years and decades. You wither and die. We are eternal. The pinnacle of evolution and existence. Before us, you are nothing. Your extinction is inevitable. We are the end of everything._"

Shepard however wasn't going to back down without a fight. "There is an entire galaxy of races united and ready to face you."

"_Confidence born of ignorance. The cycle cannot be broken._"

"Cycle?" Shepard quickly realized what it meant, "Liaraâ€¦!"

"_The pattern has repeated itself more times than you can fathom. Organic civilizations rise, evolve, advance. And at the apex of their glory, they are extinguished. The Protheans were not the first. They did not create the Citadel. They did not forge the mass relays. They merely found them, the legacy of my kind._"

Tali was now attempting to grasp at that logic, "Why would you construct the mass relays, then leave them for someone else to find? It doesn't make sense."

"_Your civilization is based on the technology of the mass relay, our technology. By using it, your society develops along the paths we desire. We impose order on the chaos of organic evolution. You exist because we allow it. And you will end because we demand

>it."

With that confession Tali quickly understood the Reaper's motives, "They're harvesting us! Letting us advance to the level they need, then wiping us out!"

Six was still fighting the visions in her mind but she was strong enough to stand on her own now. She looked to the hologram, "Why do this? Slaves? Resources?"

"_My kind transcends your very understanding. We are each a nation. Independent, free of all weakness. You cannot even grasp the nature of our existence._"

Six knew the vision wasn't of just one Reaper, "Where are the rest of the Reapers? You can't be the last."

"_We are legion. The time of our return is coming. Our numbers will darken the sky of every world. You cannot escape your doom._"

Shepard quickly demanded it, "Where did you come from? Who built you?"

"_We have no beginning. We have no end. We are infinite. Millions of years after your civilization has been eradicated and forgotten, we will endure._"

With Sovereign unwilling to speak any further, Shepard blew it off, "You're not even alive. Not really. You're just a machine. And machines can be broken!"

"_Your words are as empty as your future. I am the vanguard of your destruction. This exchange is over._"

The interface deactivated as the windows around the tower were blasted open. Not long after their comm activated, "_Commander? We got trouble!_"

"Hit me, Joker."

"_That ship, Sovereign? It's moving. I don't know what you did down there, but that thing just pulled a turn that would shear any of our ships in half. It's coming your way, and it's coming hard! You need to wrap things up in thereâ€"fast!_"

Tali looked over the controls, all of it disabled now. "There's nothing we can do here. Ideas, Shepard?"

"Let's head to the breeding facility. Joker can pick us up after we set the nuke." As they returned to Sork they found he had dealt with a geth destroyer that attempted to ambush them upon their return. As they continued through the office, Shepard stopped to Sork, "I think it's time you bring in the reinforcements." He nodded, sending Joker the means to signal _Ardent Prayer_.

* * *

><p>As instructed, Shipmaster Rho 'Barutumee and his crew repaired the damage to Ardent Prayer and were awaiting the signal from the Light of Sanghelios. It has been over one hundred units since the Oracle was presented to them and still they wait. Suddenly they started to receive a signal. "Shipmaster, the Light of Sanghelios has signaled."

"Track the coordinates. Get us there as soon as possible!" The crew was battle ready now as they ship jumped into slipspace.

* * *

><p>With the facility's AA guns disabled, the Normandy came in with the package as Kaidan and a team helped move it into position. Unfortunately Williams and the salarians were encountering heavy geth resistance, trapping them on the tower. Cortez, O'Brien and Jorge managed to get within the facility though they were meeting heavy resistance as well, though nothing they couldn't handle, they just needed time to reach them. Shepard had Tali go onto into the _Normandy_ as Garrus took her place.

Fighting through another group of geth the team spotted a dropship overhead. "Damn. Geth are sending in reinforcements."

"_Heads up, LT. We just spotted a troop ship headed to your location._"

"_It's already here. There's geth pouring out all over the bomb site._"

Shepard looked back, "Can you hold them off?"

"_There's too many. I don't think we can survive until you get here. I'm activating the bomb._"

"Alenko, what are you doing?"

"_I'm just making sure this bomb goes off. No matter what. It's done, Commander. Go get Williams and get the hell of here._"

"_Screw that! We can handle ourselves. Go back and get Alenko._"

Shepard was visibly distraught, attempting to decide between her two crewmembers, though unwilling to leave either one behind. Seeing her lean against the railing, Sork looked down to where they just cut through more geth and krogans. "If you cannot decide human, I will make the choice for you!"

Sork jumped down, bracing himself as his hooves landed back in the shallow water. Shepard rushed over to the railing, "Sork, what are you doing?"

He looked back up to them, "Save the amphibians and the female, I'll assist the others! Demon, do not die before our duel."

Six nodded to him, grabbing Shepard's shoulder, "Come on Commander, we have to help Williams before it's too late."

Sork grabbed his energy sword in one hand and Plasma Rifle in the other, he returned to the bomb site just as a human was hit with a Carnage from one of the geth. Alenko was down, injured by one of the geth but not dead yet, having inflicted far more server injuries to humans personally before they were killed. Sork rushed at the geth, rifle blazing so he could close the gap and start slicing at them. Even as he cut down geth after geth the dropship remained to deploy more. Eventually the sword's energy depleted and Sork was attacked from behind with a shotgun.

Down on his knees, the Light of Sanghelios looked up to see a geth destroyer pointing its weapon to his face. Sork was growling with anger, however something distracted the geth. Sork knocked the geth off its feet, moving himself away as a DX-25 Spirit dropship arrived at their position, firing on the geth as members of the Honor Guardsmen jumped down to engage. Pushing the geth back, one of the Honor Guardsmen helped Sork steady himself. Where the Light of Sanghelios' armor was white, the other Honor Guardsmen armor was red. The Honor Guardsmen gave Sork an energy stave and three plasma grenades, "We are here to fight at your side, Light of Sanghelios."

Sork took the weapon, ready to fight, however he turned back, looking to Alenko, "Human, how do you fair?"

Kaidan was bleeding, but it wasn't that bad. "I'll live. But what about the others?"

"They will live as well." Sork looked to the bomb he was leaning against, "And the bomb? What is its status?"

"Armed. We've got four, five minutes tops."

Sork looked to his men, "My warriors, save the human. I will remain."

"But Light of Sangheliosâ€|"

Sork grabbed the shoulder of the Honor Guard who was in protest, "No. This base and the secrets it holds must be destroyed, at any cost. My brothers, you will be needed to keep our brothers strong during the Covenant's darkest hour to come. Now take this human, save the imps and demon and go!" All of them bowed to Sork, one grabbed Alenko as another gave Sork a new energy sword.

All of the warriors slammed their fist to their chest, all of them resounding, "By the will of the gods, may you accompany us on the Great Journey!"

Sork could not tell them the truth, even now. He saluted to them as well, "Be well my warriors, and ensure all who are still on this planet make it back to the fleet."

With them all loaded into the Spirit dropship the ship fell back as a new geth dropship arrived. Sork, with energy stave in his right and the new energy sword in his left, ready to fight and hold off the geth for as long as he can.

* * *

><p>Cortez, Jorge and O'Brien took out another geth armature, though now they were surrounded by Covenant forces. As the trio prepared to fight, a Spirit dropship and several Phantoms arrived. The side doors opened to reveal Alenko at the side of several Elites, all of whom had armor similar to Sork's except red instead of white. The Elite looked to the others, "Everyone, we are evacuating from this world." He then looked to them, "Imps. Demon," the Elite gestured his arm to the empty section of the Spirit's arm. The trio looked to one another, hesitant, but seeing how they were cut off from the rendezvous with the other they didn't have too many options when it came to escaping the facility before it exploded.<p>

40. Chapter 40

**A/N: **Part 3 of a 3 part special update(so go back two chapters if you just skipped to the last one). I couldn't just leave the Virmire situation in pieces.

* * *

><p>Traveling up the elevator to the AA tower they found Williams, Kirrahe and the other salarians holding behind the gun itself as the geth tried to push them out. Over the radio Williams called out to the team, "You need to move fast, Commander. We can't hold them off here much longer. Watch the corners! Suppressing fire!"

Six rushed out the elevator first, pulling out both combat blades as she kicked a geth destroyer down to the floor and jabbed her blades into the spinal column of two geth shock troopers. She crushed the head of the destroyer before rolling behind some crates as the other geth turned to fire on her. Now focused on her, Shepard, Garrus and Wrex focused fire on the last destroyer, leaving the last shock trooper to Williams and the salarians.

With the last geth down, Kirrahe and Williams moved to meet Shepard, however something wasn't right as Six drew her DMR out. There was a biotic explosion that happened near her. Garrus looked up and spotted Saren as he flew toward them on a hover board, continuing his biotic onslaught and forcing everyone to cover.

Shepard fired on him three times, though his kinetic barrier took all three hits with relative ease. Now on the ground, Saren started to speak, "This has been an impressive diversion, Shepard. My geth were utterly convinced the salarians were the real threat. Or at least until the Covenant decided to revolt. Of course, it was all for nothing. I can't let either of you disrupt what I have accomplished here. You can't possibly understand what's really at stake."

From cover, Shepard shouted, "Why are you doing this?"

"You've seen the vision from the beacons, Shepard. You of all people should understand what the Reapers are capable of. They cannot be stopped."

Six moved out of cover for a moment, also to fire on Saren, "No, she doesn't. I do. They're nothing compared to the Covenant."

"You?" Saren turned to her slightly at a loss as to who she was at first. "I see you are the demon the Covenant has so feared." Saren mused as to why they were so fearful of her, though that time would be for later, "It is true, the Covenant are a force to be reckoned with, however with their current numbers they are nothing. But do not mire yourself in pointless revolt. Do not sacrifice everything for the sake of petty freedoms. The Protheans tried to fight, and they were utterly destroyed. Trillions dead. But what if they had bowed before the invaders? Would the Protheans still exist? Is submission not preferable to extinction?"

Six stood her ground, keeping her DMR trained on Saren's head, "Do you believe the Reapers will let us live?"

Saren threw his arms out, "Now you see why I never came forward with this to the Council. We organics are driven by emotion instead of logic. We will fight even when we know we cannot win, such as your desperate fight against the Covenant. But if we work with the Reapers if we make ourselves useful think how many lives could be spared!" Saren turned to Shepard, "Once I understood this, I joined Sovereign, though I was aware of the dangers. I had hoped this facility could protect me."

Shepard could see that, given all of the experiments he has run here, "You're afraid Sovereign is influencing you. You're afraid he's controlling your thoughts."

Saren fell silent, knowing this to be true, "I've studied the effects of indoctrination. The more control Sovereign exerts, the less

capable the subject becomes. That is my saving grace. Sovereign needs me to find the Conduit. My mind is still my ownâ€¦for now. But the transformation from ally to servant can be subtle. I will not let it happen to me."

Six shouted to him again, "Why are the geth following it?"

"They believe Sovereign to be some kind of god. The pinnacle of their own evolution. But the reaction of their deity is most telling: it is insulted. Sovereign does not desire the pitiful devotions the geth hurl at it. They are just tools, and no amount of belief on their part will change that. But as tools, they are useful. They will survive the coming invasion. If organic life is to survive, we must also prove we are useful. We must work with the Reapers."

Shepard called out to Saren again, "Tell me why Sovereign needs the Conduit. Tell me what it is. Maybe we can find a way to stop them."

Saren became contempt as he spat, "The Conduit is the key to your destruction and my salvation. Sovereign needs my help to find it. That is the only reason I have not been indoctrinated."

Shepard could see Saren was swaying, now she just needed to get him to tip in their favor. "Sovereign's manipulating you and you don't even know it! You're already under its power!"

"No! Sovereign needs me. If I find the Conduit, I've been promised a reprieve from the inevitable."

Shepard could hear the uncertainty in his voice and she could see his intentions, as twisted as they may be, he could have lost himself when he started messing with it. Whatever the case, she was hoping to reach out to the Spectre he once was, "Together we can stop Sovereign. We don't have to submit to the Reapers. We can beat them!"

Saren looked down for a moment, slowly looking toward Shepard again, "I no longer believe that, Shepard. The visions cannot be denied. The Reapers are too powerful. The only hope of survival is to join with them. Sovereign is a machine. It thinks like a machine. If I can prove my value, I become a resource worth maintaining. There is no other logical conclusion!"

Garrus however had enough, "You were a Spectre. You were sworn to defend the galaxy. Then you broke that vow to save yourself!"

Saren glanced over to Garrus, unswayed by his words, even though he was turian as well, "I'm not doing this for myself!" he then turned back to Six, "Don't you see? Sovereign will succeed. It is inevitable. My way is the only way any of us will survive! I'm forging an alliance between us and the Reapers. Between organics and machines. And in doing so, I will have saved more lives than have ever existed." As Saren continued on, one of the salarian STG soldiers attempted to get a jump on Saren while he was distracted. However the turian seemed alert to his presence the entire time, though displayed no prior notion for awareness. When the salarian tried to attack, Saren reached out and grabbed the salarian's neck. "But you would undo my work. You would doom our entire civilization to complete annihilation. And for that, you must die." Saren quickly

crushed the salarian's spine and tossed the body toward Six, using that as a distraction so he could get back onto his platform as he took the salarian's weapon and attacked the team.

Shepard opened fire on Saren, as he took advantage of the platform and the air, giving himself distance and rendering certain positions to be useless against him. Wrex tried to use a Carnage against him, but Saren used his own to intercept the krogan's. The turian quickly used a biotic attack in an attempt to force them out of cover. Six took cover but the attack was a feint so Saren could move around them and use attack them from around their flank, forcing them toward the destroyed gun.

Once the group was pushed back, Saren's board unleashed a powerful blast that knocked everyone, even Six, off their feet. With everyone down, Saren tossed the assault rifle down as he rushed to Shepard. He dragged her by the collar of her armor and daggled her over the edge. Before Six could rush to Shepard's aid, the base's sirens distracted Saren long enough for Shepard to deliver a decent blow to his jaw to release her. As she pulled herself back up, Shepard grabbed her pistol but Saren was already flying away just as the _Normandy_ arrived for pick up.

* * *

><p>Sork 'Tasuvai, the formerly dishonored Light of Sanghelios, now has been given a chance at redemption, both for himself and in the eyes of his brothers, and now he faced an unrelenting enemy attempting to defuse an explosive device meant to destroy the facility of Saren. He was skillfully using the energy stave to keep the geth at a distance while using the energy sword to finish them off. He gazed up for a moment as he watched the human ship Normandy fleeing from the AA tower. Sork activated his comm to Tali, "Tali can you hear me?"

"_Sork? We're leaving! Where are you? Are you with your people?_"

Sork skewered another geth as he sliced a geth juggernaut in two before he took cover, "No. I am still at the facilityâ€|"

"_What? I'll get Joker to take us back and we'llâ€|_"

"No. Listen to me, it was arrogant for me to believe I was destined to be burdened with such a great task. It now falls to the demon and the Oracle." Sork used the last plasma grenade to keep the geth busy a bit longer, "Know that I have only one regret; my inability to fulfill the promise to the demon."

"_You are forgiven, Sork __'Tasuvai, Light of Sanghelios._"

"Demon." Sork started to smile now. "I pray that the next we meet our promise can finally be fulfilled. Now find and slay Saren, betrayer of all." Sork let out a roar before he rushed from his position, taking down more geth as his shield started to weaken from the amount of fire he was taking. The warrior fought with every fiber of his being; slicing geth to pieces, crushing them under hoof, or running them through with the stave. The display was beautiful if not frightening at the same time. Eventually his shield broke once again as his legs were shot. A geth prime was now on top of him, hitting

the stave and sword out of Sork's hands. In the end though, Sork had won, the fighting was to delay them from reaching the bomb and he had succeeded. Sork started to laugh now as the prime aimed its weapon on his head, "Now machines, let us take our own Great Journey together!" He had fought valiantly, and kept his charge safe, no Sangheili could ask for more in an honorable death. Before the prime could fire the drive core detonated.

* * *

><p>As the Normandy flew away from the facility, Tali and Six were silently in mourning for the Light of Sanghelios. Six finally broke the silence, pulling Dot from her helmet, she turned to Tali, "I know he was only here because you saved his lifeâ€|but if you wantedâ€|I-I could continue where he left offâ€|"<p>

Tali was still depressed at his loss, unwilling to believe he was gone. "Thank you, but I'm alrightâ€|I justâ€| You know it's funny, I never wanted anyone to protect me, and yet at the same time I was glad he was." Tali turned away, "He could have made it you knowâ€|one of those Covenant ships could have picked him up at the last instance, or he found a way to escape the blastâ€|" Six said nothing, placing her hand on Tali's shoulder.

* * *

><p>With Sovereign and the remaining geth ships in retreat from the system, _Unending Resolve_ and the others were greeted to an unexpected intrusion, _Ardent Prayer_. Fleet Master Rayta Nar 'Zaconomee looked to the missing ship and to the human vessel, "Open communication with _Ardent Prayer_. Find out how Shipmaster Ardo 'Moretumee got here. Lower one of the hangar shields to allow the humans in. We have much to discuss with both."

"Shall I have teams ready, Fleet Master?"

Rayta started to leave the bridge, "No, I will greet them personally, and return what is there's." As he left two Mgalekgolo joined him, weary of the demons and imps.

* * *

><p>Even with Ardent Prayer on their side, the _Normandy_ wouldn't be capable of escaping a fight against the Covenant fleet. However the fleet was not charging their weapons. Instead, the largest ship lowered the shielding to one of the hangars and hailed to the _Normandy_ to pick up their people.

The crew knew this was the belly of the beast and Six wasn't taking any chances, having Wrex, Williams and Garrus combat ready within the garage and ready to close up even if Six and Shepard couldn't make it. Inside the hangar bay there were several Grunts loading equipment into dropships and Six spotted a few Jackal snipers keeping the pair in their sights. A lone gold armored Elite, assumedly Fleet Master Rayta, followed by two Hunters appeared from one of the doors with Alenko, O'Brien, Cortez and Jorge, all of them unharmed though Elite Honor Guards were surrounding them.

Shepard and Six held their position near the ramp to the _Normandy_'s garage as the Fleet Master moved closer. "Demon. I do not understand

why the Light of Sanghelios wanted to have these humans saved, nor do I understand why he was willing to fight at your side. However," the Fleet Master raised his hand and forcing the Jackal snipers to stand down, "I am willing to hear why."

Six didn't say a word to him, instead she snapped her fingers as Lamenting Light floated out of the _Normandy_. "You requested my attendance, Reclaimer?"

"An Oracle?" All of the Elites and Grunts quickly bowed down to Light's presence, "Blessed is the day an Oracle of the gods has graced us with its presenceâ€|" However the Fleet Master quickly realized that Light was with the humans. The Fleet Master slowly raised his head, "Great Oracle, why have you shown yourself alongside the humans, those decreed by the Prophets to be heretics?"

"Oh my, your people have truly become rather dramatic since last we met." Light looked up and spotted something familiar, "How interesting. I knew the Huragok would survive the array's blast, but I never imagined they would fall into such servitude. I suppose the Forerunners made them too placid for their own good."

"Light."

"Of course Reclaimer, forgive my impedance." Light turned back to the Elite, "If you would be so kind as to release the other Reclaimers and human, I will gladly assist in edification for your group."

The Fleet Master raised himself, signaling the Honor Guards to release the humans, "Yes, I believe there is much we need to discuss Oracle."

As Lamenting Light floated off to speak with the Elites, O'Brien, Cortez and Jorge joined Six and Shepard, Jorge still rather suspicious about the whole thing, "I don't know, are we sure this is the right thing to do?"

Six looked, to the Elites as she saw despair befall their faces, "Yeah, I do."

* * *

><p>Rayta and the Honor Guard were told the truth of the Halo Array and of humanity's status as the true successors to the Forerunner legacy. "I seeâ€|Sork 'Tasuvai, you knew and you were helping us prepare for this momentâ€|" Rayta looked back to the humans, the smaller demon in particular. He walked over to the group of humans, "Demon, I now understand why the Light of Sanghelios was willing to fight at your side, and there are no words to justify our acts against your kind. However," the Fleet Master bowed down to them on one knee, "You have my solemn vow that every blade will be yours to use against Saren and the Sovereign." The Honor Guardsmen also joined in kneeling before them, following Rayta's lead.<p>

The larger demon looked back to the others, "Well I'll be damned."

"The Light of Sangheliosâ€|"

Rayta stopped the demon, "His sacrifice will not be forgotten."

"Nor his debt." Vaht 'Komtaree appeared looking to the human vessel and to his father's charge who was watching everything from a distance. Kneeling down to her, "I humbly accept the Light of Sanghelios' life debt and will protect his charge until the debt has properly been repaid."

* * *

><p>Six looked back to the garage, spotting Tali who looked uncertain about accepting. "You might want to give her some time to think about it."<p>

Shepard however had other concerns. "I think you and your people need to go over everyone who has ever been inside of Sovereign. The ship has the power to manipulate minds. It's probably what led to your Prophet to end up how he was."

The Fleet Master slowly rose himself back to his feet, "Yes, I believe that would explain some of the fleet's strange behavior as of late. But how can we be certain?"

"I could assist in the matter." Lamenting Light started to scan everyone in the hangar bay, including the Hunters. "I do not detect any unusual mental anomalies beyond the Reclaimer's abnormal beta wave activity. For a more thorough analysis I will begin scanning the rest of the fleet and its crews."

The group of Honor Guards ventured forth, "We offer our services to guide you through our fleet and to properly expunge those who have been grafted with its curse."

"That would be most helpful indeed." Light looked back to Six, "This will take some time to complete Reclaimer, but I will return once this task has been accomplished."

Six nodded, "Go ahead." She then turned back to the Fleet Master, "Do you have any information on where Saren is planning to go?"

Slowly he started to shake his head, "No, I do not. We had kept much from him as he had kept much from us. However, I do look forward to his demise, be it by our hands or yours, demon."

* * *

><p>Back within the Normandy the team was trying to get over the events of Virmire, some astonishingly affected by the news of Sork's demise. "Man I thought I'd be glad to hear about split-lip's death. But to save Kaidanâ€|"

"I know. When he came onboard, I didn't think he'd do that for any of us. Well expect for Tali I mean."

Williams, oddly enough for her, also felt some guilt, "If we didn't get split up like that, if Cortez and the others were with us, he wouldn't have had to sacrifice himself."

Wrex closed his eyes, reflecting on the mistake he almost made as himself, "He died as a warrior, standing on his own two feet. Other than fighting her," pointing toward Six, "he wouldn't have wanted it

any other way."

Cortez looked toward Tali, "After Lamenting Light showed up, I suppose he had a change of heart." He then turned back to Six, "But, we can all honor him by finishing what was started on Eden Prime."

Six stepped into the center of the room, awaiting Liara to join their minds and finally interpret the vision in its entirety. "Relax, Six. Embrace eternity!" Liara's eyes turned black as the two went through the vision once again. As they did there was more to it than before, even portions where Six could see far more clearly. When they were finish Liara was slightly reeling from the experience, taking a seat to catch her breath, "Incredible. Iâ€¦I never thought the images would be soâ€¦intense. I need a moment to collect myself."

Six was also feeling the pressure, as Jorge was helping her Shepard turned to Liara, "Did the vision make any sense to you?"

Liara took a moment to reflect before rising from her seat, "It's a distress call, a message sent out across the Prothean Empire. A warning against the Reapers, but the warning came too late."

"What about the Conduit?"

Liara closed her eyes to remember, "There were other images. Locations. Places I recognized from my researchâ€¦" quickly donning on her, "Ilos! The Conduit is on Ilos! That is why Saren needed to find the Mu Relay! It is the only way to get to Ilos."

O'Brien stopped her, "Whoa there doc, why didn't you mention Ilos before now?"

Liara seemed somewhat offended by O'Brien's remark, "The Mu Relay links to dozens of systems and hundreds of worlds. How was I to know Ilos was the one we wanted? Without the Cipher, the images in her visions were never clear. Only now do I recognize them as landmarks from Ilos."

"Guess that makes Ilos our next stop," Jorge stated without an understanding of the galactic situation.

"Forget it. The Mu Relay's inside the Terminus Systems. Alliance ships are not welcome there. Neither are Spectres," Tali corrected him, knowing that region of space from her people's wandering.

Six was standing on her own now, "The Conduit's on Ilos. That's where Saren is heading. We need to get there before he does!"

Liara couldn't be in more of a disagreement with such a plan, "Saren will have his entire fleet orbiting Ilos. You will never make it down to the surface without reinforcements. We must alert the Council. We need a fleet toâ€¦ohhhâ€¦" Liara almost fell to her knees were it not for Garrus catching her. "I am sorry. The joining isâ€¦exhausting. I should go to the medical bay and lie down for a moment."

"We're done here. Dismissed."

* * *

><p>AN: **I really couldn't stop after I got rolling with it. I might do the same again, but I'll probably have a chapter inbetween.

41. Chapter 41

**A/N: **That Citadel DLC was fun and funny. For anyone who loved the crew from Mass Effect 1, 2, or 3, I highly recommend getting the DLC for one final laugh with friends and romances(especially for FemSheps who loved Thane, and the smack Jacob deserved if you kept it). Hell, I'd tell ya to get it just to be able to fight alongside Wrex(main story and supsequent combat arena) and the others from ME2(Armax Arena only).

* * *

><p>The Normandy was still within _Unending Resolve_'s hangar waiting for the monitor, Lamenting Light, to finish scanning every member of the Covenant to ensure the indoctrination has not afflicted their ranks. During the wait Shepard had a conversation with the Council and spoke with everyone on board, including Captain Kirrahe, trying to see how everyone was fairing. Everyone on board was feeling the absence of Sork, though Tali was hit the hardest as much as she didn't want to admit it.

Shepard spoke with Six last, as she preferred to hold her conversations private from Dot and the others. With Six now in Shepard's quarter, Shepard tried to have her take a seat, but like before she declined. "So, what's your assessment of all of this?"

"Permission to speak freely, Commander."

"I keep an open door policy, Hitomi. Speak your mind."

"Ma'am," Six loosened her stance slightly, "The Citadel Council is a bunch of pigheaded fools who are threatening the entire galaxy because they aren't willing to commit. My personal recommendation is that we take the _Normandy_ and the Covenant fleet here and head to Ilos immediately, with or without Council approval."

"I can understand your feelings, but I'd rather have that as a last resort if the Council truly doesn't want to pursue Ilos."

"But Commanderâ€¦"

"I'm sorry Hitomi, but I haven't seen everything you have, I don't know exactly how bad these Reapers are, and I'm willing to trust you and Liara about the visions. But I won't send this crew on a one way trip!" Shepard watch as Six turned her head away, thinking about Noble Team, "I'm sorry. But like I said, going straight to Ilos without more reinforcements will be a last resort thing. Are we clear?"

"Yes, ma'am." Six was about to leave before she stopped herself. "Ma'am, when we confront Saren, we have to kill him. But, I don't think he's completely lost to indoctrination, yet."

"What makes you say that?"

"The Covenant. He forged an alliance with them somehow. Other than their hate for the geth, their leadership were religious fanatics. Even if they wanted to indoctrinate a number of them, he didn't need to implant that Prophet. I think Saren was fighting back, subconsciously, giving the Covenant reason to break away from Sovereign before it was too late. When the time comes, we might be able to use that to our advantage, break his resolve like we did on Virmire."

"Whatever he may have been, he's can't be allowed to succeed. That much I do understand. But I'll think about your words before we confront him again."

* * *

><p>It took Lamenting Light roughly three hours to scan everyone and there were a number of executions that followed, all of them had direct exposure to Sovereign on multiple occasions, including Shipmaster Ramo' Ranjamee and his small gathering that once supported using the geth as tools for the Covenant. During that time Fleet Master Rayta had Shipmaster Rho as the two informed the other of what has occurred. It took some convincing on Vaht's part, but Tali begrudgingly accepted his services to continue his father's life debt.<p>

As the _Normandy_ was leaving _Unending Resolve_, Joker picked a message, "_I forwarded the mission update to the Citadel, Commander. We've got confirmation on those reinforcements. Ambassador Udina wants us to report back to the Citadel. The Council is massing a joint-species fleet to deal with Saren and the geth._"

"I knew they'd come around." Six just happened to be next to the CIC as Shepard turned to her, "I told you they would act. Back to the Citadel, Joker. I want the _Normandy_ at the head of that fleet!"

"_Yes, ma'am!_"

* * *

><p>Within the Council chamber, Ambassador Udina was already speaking with the Council as Shepard, Kaidan and Williams arrived, "Good job, Shepard. Thanks to you, the Council's finally taking real action against Saren!"<p>

Councilor Tevos confirmed, "The ambassador is correct. If Saren is foolish enough to attack the Citadelâ€"as you believeâ€"we will be ready for him."

To which Councilor Valern noted, "Patrols are stationed at every mass relay linking Citadel space to the Terminus Systems."

Shepard was skeptical of the plan, especially without a single mention of Ilos. "How many ships are you sending to attack Ilos?"

Councilor Marnath denounced the notion, "Ilos is only accessible through the Mu Relay, deep inside the Terminus Systems, Commander. If we send a fleet in there, the only possible outcome is full-scale

war."

"Now is the time for discretion, Commander. Saren's greatest weapon was secrecy. Exposed, he is no longer a threat. This is over."

As much as Shepard didn't want to believe the Council and Udina could be so blind as Six believed, Shepard tried to convince them otherwise, "Secrecy isn't his greatest weapon. The Conduit is!"

Marnath quickly countered her notion, "Saren is a master manipulator. The Conduit is just a distraction from his real plan to attack the Citadel."

Shepard wasn't going to let it go, not after speaking with Sovereign, "Sovereign's the real threat! Saren's just a servant of the Reapers."

Tevos was rather skeptical, even with the report from Virmire, "Only you have seen the Reapers. And then only in visions. We won't invade the Terminus Systems because of a dream." Thus far Shepard and crew have been reporting it was she who was exposed to the beacon and experiencing the visions, something that proved to play in their favor in a few instances now.

"One ship going into the Terminus Systems won't start a war. I can be discreet," knowing she'd have backing from the Covenant fleet regardless.

"You detonated a nuclear device on Virmire. I won't call that discreet!"

Tevos quickly calmed the situation that Valern attempted to create, "Your style served you well in the Traverse, Commander. We recognize that. But Ilos requires a deft touch. We have the situation under control."

"If Saren finds the Conduit, we're all screwed! We have to go to Ilos!"

Valern turned his attention away from Shepard, "Ambassador Udina, I get the sense Commander Shepard isn't willing to let this go."

"There are serious political implications here, Shepard. Humanity's made great gains thanks to you. But now you're becoming more trouble than you're worth."

"You bastard! You're selling us out!" Kaidan was holding Ashley back from actually socking Udina, though he was tempted to let her go and give Udina one for him.

Udina didn't even bother to look back to Shepard as he took a few steps forward to make himself more prominent, "It's just politics, Commander. You've done your job, now let me do mine. We've locked out all of the Normandy's primary systems. Until further notice, you're grounded."

"Are you insane? After everything I've done, you still don't believe me?"

Udina looked back now, "I think it's time for you and your team to leave, Commander. This is no longer concerns you. The Council can handle this. With my help, of course," showing his true colors to Shepard.

* * *

><p>After the meeting with the Council and Udina, they dismissed the evidence on Sovereign and the Reapers. As Shepard attempted to push harder Udina had the Normandy locked down and the Council had no intentions of pursuing Ilos, instead they had their fleets patrolling the mass relays connecting Council Space and the Traverse.

Shepard was back on the ship where she pounded her fist against her locker, angry at what had happened. Shepard heard footsteps behind her, quickly turning to find Six before she slide down to sit on the floor. "I warned youâ€¦"

Shepard turned away, "I thought they'd listen. That they'd see the truth."

Six looked around, "The most threatening forces they've ever encountered have been the rachni and the krogans. They believe themselves to be the superior, the masters of this technology. They're lying to themselves, not wanting to believe there is something bigger out there that they are unaware of, capable of wiping them out with relative ease."

Shepard leaned her head against the locker and closed her eyes, "We'll think of something. I just need to figure things out."

Six nodded, "And you'll have us behind you."

Six gave Shepard a hand, getting her back to her feet when the speakers activated. "_Commander, I've got a message from Captain Anderson._"

The two of them looked up to the speakers, "Are you spying on me, Joker?"

"_No, ma'am. Just knew you were on the ship and figured I'd pass the message on. The captain said to meet him at Flux. That club down in the wards._"

Six looked over, "Sounds like we just might have that opportunity presented to us."

* * *

><p>As Shepard, Six and Kaiden met with Anderson, Vaht was still accommodating himself to being surrounded by humans and the fact that they were not the heretics his people once believed them to be as he continued to learn from Lamenting Light. "Why have the Prophet's betray us in such a way?"<p>

"I do not know the exact history of your Covenant, however I believe it was out of fear." Vaht looked to the monitor with uncertainty as he continued, "Fear of your people and who are stronger in comparison

to them, fear that the correction of this mistake would shatter the alliance established."

"But it does not feel rightâ€¦we once took pride in killing the true successors of the Forerunners, but nowâ€¦"

* * *

><p>Unknown to Vaht though, Jorge and Cortez were watching the two from the doors of engineering, "So, now that the Covies are broken, what happens now?"<p>

"Personally, I don't know. But Six seems worried about these Reapers, and I think that's bad enough to say the least. If we're lucky and these Covies stay true to their word, then we might be able to turn their weapons against the Reapers and defeat them."

"That simple huh? Five Covie ships and whoever else to fight the Reapers? Do you think that's enough?"

"I don't know. These things are responsible for the galactic extinction of all space fairing sentient life 50,000 years ago, and beyond. And assuming they're just using the most advanced versions of this mass effect techâ€¦"

"Then plasma weaponry should do some serious damage. But that still doesn't exactly boost my confidence, Cortez."

"We just gotta get lucky then and hope these Reapers don't have as many as I fear."

* * *

><p>With Shepard and team back on the Normandy, the crew was informed of Anderson's plan to getting them off the Citadel and to pursue Saren and Sovereign to Ilos. Once freed from the lockdown, Joker immediately pulled the _Normandy_ out of the docks as they used the stealth system to reach the relay.

After the daring escape Shepard spoke with everyone to make sure they were all behind her with this insane plan. Everyone, including the non-humans, were willing to stand by Shepard 100%.

It would be several hours before _Normandy_ traveled through the Mu Relay and reached Ilos, time O'Brien and Williams took to show each other a way of relieving stress. Jorge and Six were checking on each other's armor and weapons, making sure everything was combat ready.

While on approach to Ilos Joker noticed something. "Uhâ€¦Commander? We've got company."

Several members of the crew were on the bridge when Shepard arrived in her armor as Liara looked to Joker, "Have their sensors picked us up yet?"

Joker turned back to her, "Stealth systems are engaged. Unless we get close enough for a visual, they won't have any idea we're here."

"Something is wrong." Vaht interrupted. "Where is the rest of the fleet?"

"We haven't given the signal to attack so I don't thinkâ€¦"

"Not the Covenant. The geth," Vaht pointed to the blockade around the planet, "This is barely a third of geth fleet I've seen. And where is the Sovereign? Saren has something else planned here."

Before Vaht could try and elaborate further Navigator Pressly found something, "Picking up some strange readings from the planet's surface."

Shepard then to the pilot, "Take us down, Joker. Lock in on the coordinates."

Pressly had to stop that order, "Negative on that, Commander. The nearest landing zone's two clicks away."

Kaidan turned to Pressly, "We'll never make it in time on foot. Get us something closer!"

Pressly yelled back, "There is nowhere closer! I've looked!"

Shepard then ordered, "Drop us in the Mako."

Pressly had to belay that, "You need at least a hundred meters of open terrain to pull off a drop like that. The most I can find near Saren is twenty."

Williams turned back to Shepard, "Twenty meters? There's no way we can make a drop in there."

Garrus wasn't going to let Saren succeed after everything they've been through chasing him, "We have to try."

Williams turned to Pressly as she yelled in frustration, "Find another landing zone!"

Pressly shouted back as he already tried, "There is no other landing zone!"

Tali looked over the mathematical probabilities of success and it was very discouraging. "The descent angle's too steep!"

O'Brien quietly muttered, "Really wished we had our drop pods right now."

Six knew what would happened, something she wasn't going to allow. "It's our only option."

Williams quickly yelled at Six, "It's not an option! It's a suicide run! We don'tâ€¦"

"I can do it," Joker said, interrupting the Chief.

Shepard looked down to the pilot, "Joker?"

Joker calmly repeated himself, but louder, "I can do it."

Shepard placed her faith in her crew as she ordered the ground team, "Gear up and head down to the Mako. Jokerâ€"drop us right on top of that bastard!" Before traveling down to the garage, Shepard grabbed Vaht, "Contact your fleet and have them ready for a fight."

"Fleet Master Rayta should still be studying your map data. He will be ready."

Shepard had as many hands as she could have fit into the Mako as they to squeezed inside and put their faith in Joker's piloting ability.

* * *

><p>As Vaht stated, Rayta and the other Shipmasters and his most trusted circle were overviewing the relay network and everything of Saren's plan they knew. "Saren plans to capture the Citadel, and yet his fleet move further away from the station."<p>

"Saren did state that this 'Conduit' was key to his plans. Perhaps they still seek it even now."

Raja spoke out of turn, "Perhaps. More likely he has the coordinates in hand and is already moved to begin his assault. I believe we should head toward this Serpent Nebula and ambush them as they appear through the relay."

Rho did not like such obstinance from a SpecOp commander, though before he could vocalize his complains, Rayta had the hologram of the galaxy zoomed on the Serpent Nebula. "Due to the relay network's restrictions, they would assume an offensive would have to come from one of the relays on their bordering territory before reaching here. If information about the Sovereign is credible, then the Sovereign will know secrets that no other species knows about the mass relays. What few defenders left will quickly be overrun. All ships, we depart for the Citadel. We must remain hidden within the nebula until the Sovereign and the geth arrive. Then we shall have retribution for the sins we were forced to commit!"

All of the Sangheili started to roar with anticipation as the holograms of the Shipmasters disappeared and Raja walked to his friend. "Fleet Master, will this be a ship-to-ship battle, or will our ground forces have a place in this confrontation?"

"We shall see. It will depend on how Saren executes his plan and if we can afford to dispatch any men or if they can even reach the destination for the ground offensive." The Fleet Master took his seat on the bridge as _Unending Resolve_ took point as the ship jumped into slipspace to await Sovereign and the geth.

* * *

><p>"Fifty thousand years, and yet still we are persecuted, falling victim to unfortunate circumstances and an unparalleled enemy we could not foresee."<p>

"Light, get to cover!" Lamenting Light finally snapped out of his somber state before he took cover behind one of the statues he was staring so blankly at.

"Six, you ready?" Six punched Jorge's fist as she waited for his distraction. The larger Spartan moved out of cover as he started to fire on the closer geth armature. "Come on you Scarab fakes! You're gonna be easier to take down than a pair of Hunters!" Drawing the attention from both, Six rushed out of her position, running to the further one as she jumped onto it's back.

Wrex rushed in, ramming into the first armature and knocking it to the ground before he started to blast it repeatedly at pointblank range with his shotgun. Six stabbed her knife into the armature's neck joint, preventing it or the cannon from turning or firing while she was ripping out wires in the neck before she pulled the back plating off and firing eight rounds into it.

With the last of the immediate danger gone, the team gathered around the destroyed armatures. "We need a team to stay with the Mako and keep her safe. Garrus, O'Brien, Alenko. I don't imagine the inside of the structure will have much space for you guys to be at your best. Cortez, take Wrex, Jorge and Williams, make sure the surrounding area is clear. Six, Tali, Liara and Vaht, we're going in."

Lamenting Light on the other hand was too focused on the huskified statuettes to pay any heed to Shepard's plans. He floated to the several different faces, "For over a hundred thousand years, we prospered and found a way to survive the brutal assault of the Parasite. And in the end, you could do nothing as a new threat proved too much for even you to handle. Rest now, for your Reclaimers have found me, and they will see to it that your new enemy will be burned from existence."

* * *

><p>AN: **Here is your dreaded one chapter update. The next one should be a dozy.

42. Chapter 42

**A/N: **Part-1 of 3. Well my friends, we have come to the end of this story in a three part update. Do not worry, I'm only ending it here so I can continue it under a new story name(of which is still a work in progress).

* * *

><p>With Lamenting Light completely out of it since he spotted those strange elongated husk statues, Shepard and Six pushed onward to try and open the doors to follow Saren. With Tali hacking geth from time to time and Liara flinging them around with her biotics, the team quickly pushed their way through and found a way to the lower levels. Six took a closer look at the elevator's controls, slightly amazed by the 50,000 year old tech, "This place still has power?"<p>

Tali looked at many of the still deactivate functions, "It must be running off its own generator."

Vaht did not like such slow lifts. "This has to be the command center the geth used to seal the doors. Once they have been slaughtered, a means to disengage the lockdown should reveal itself."

Six stopped the group from proceeding any further, raising her DMR's scope and adjusting for the dim lighting. "We've got a Prime and a few others holding a choke point. I also see four armature units in standby mode."

"Do you see any kind of terminals nearby?"

Six looked around again. "Four terminals."

Tali thought this over trying to think of a plan. "If I could somehow get to those terminals without the geth noticing I could reprogram the armatures to attack the other geth. The problem though is that they will spot us before I can work on the first terminal."

Six grabbed for one of her grenades, "Can we scramble their visuals with just smoke?"

"For a moment, but they would quickly adjust to it and find us."

Vaht leaned down, "Then I will act as a diversion while you override the terminals."

Shepard stopped the Sangheili warrior, "Or you go and override the terminals instead." She gave the Sangheili plenty of omni-gel, "That should be enough to override any one of them. Try not getting killed."

Six readied the grenade making sure Vaht was on standby for the grenade to release its smoke cover. With the grenade out, Six delayed him long enough to use the smoke at its fullest effect. With Vaht using his active camo and in the smoke, Six moved to a modest position away from the others before she started to fire a few rounds to draw the attention of the geth to give Vaht even more time.

With the geth focused on her, believing her to be the primary threat, Vaht used the omni-gel and placed the gel capsules onto the terminals. With all four terminals active the four armatures activated and opened fire on the other geth. Now caught within their own trap, Shepard moved up to provide Vaht with move covering fire to get out of the area, letting the armatures finish the geth off for them.

Even with the prime fighting with them, the geth were quickly overwhelmed within the confined space. Vaht disposed of the armatures using his energy sword to slice off each of their heads.

With the area secured, Shepard went into the control room and opened the gate. Vaht continued to watch their flanks for more geth. "Come. Saren already has a headstart. We must find him before he reaches the Conduit."

Six turned to Vaht, "Unless he's already found it. Then we're just walking into a trap."

"A chance we will must take to exact revenge."

Shepard stopped Six from going off as a hologram started to display. "Hold onâ€¦something's happening."

The damaged hologram continued to speak though they could only hear strange chattering. "Sounds like some kind of message. But I don't recognize the language."

"It is probably in Prothean. This recording must be 50,000 years old. No wonder we cannot understand it."

Vaht disregarded it, "Distorted chatter from those long past. We need to move if we are to catch up with Saren."

Six however moved closer to the hologram, "It's a warning. A message about the Reaper invasion."

Liara looked to Six, awestruck, "Of course. Between the beacons and the Cipher, an understanding of the Prothean language would have been transferred into your mind."

Shepard turned to her as there was a pause in the message. "What's it saying? Can you make out anything useful?"

Six continued to listen to it, though there wasn't much to listen to. "There's too much degradation. The first voice mentioned something about refuge in the archives, the Citadel, being overwhelmed. The second voice mentioned the Conduit but nothing more that would help us."

* * *

><p>Back on the surface the gate opened. Garrus turned to O'Brien, "Who votes we take the vehicle into the creepy, underground bunker?"<p>

O'Brien opened the hatch, "I like it. Let's have the geth running in fear of our firepower for once."

* * *

><p>With the whole team back and ready, and Lamenting Light out of his fantasy world, the Mako slowly drove in, cautious of any traps or ambushes. As they did, Liara looked at the structures they were passing, trying to absorb everything she could, "I have spent my life studying the Protheans, but I never dreamed I would discover anything like this! This bunker might have been the last refuge of their entire species. Just imagine what mysteries it might hold. Imagine what secrets it might reveal!"<p>

Williams was the first to try and snap her out of her own stupor, "Hey! Try to remember why we're here, Saren, the Conduit, the fate of the entire known galaxy?"

"I am sorryâ€¦I was swept up in the moment. I just hope we have the opportunity to study this place in detail after this is done."

Cortez didn't like this unusual quietness. "I thought Saren would have set some kind of trap or ambush for us."

Kaidan tried to look at this in a positive, "They must have been in too much of a hurry."

O'Brien was getting his SMG ready, "With our luck, it's more likely we just haven't yet to run into it."

Wrex took control over the cannon, taking a look for himself, "What are all those things on the wall? Some kind of containers?"

Jorge peered out from the windows. "They look more like cryo-chambers."

A notion Liara started to continue with, "Yes, the Protheans probably tried to keep themselves alive through cryogenic freezing. Something must have gone wrong. This bunker became their tomb. The pods are dead, as well as anyone inside."

"All of them?" Tali looked to them with sorrow, "There must be hundreds of those pods. What was Saren expecting to find here? There's nothing left but corpses."

Vaht tried to arrange himself, though it was a rather tight fit inside. "All the more reason for Saren to die. He has disturbed such a holy sight, such disrespect can only be answered in blood."

As they continued through the long passageway they only found two rocket gets left behind, easily blasted and run over by the Mako as Shepard continued at her relatively decent pace. While they were driving past more defunct lifepods an energy curtain activated in front of them, cutting off their path.

"What is happening?"

Shepard was about to double back when Wrex, still in control of the cannon, saw another energy curtain box them in, cutting Light from them as well, "It's a trap! Saren must have set an ambush!"

Six opened the hatch, "I don't think Saren is behind this."

With boots in the water drenched tunnel, a door opened waiting for them to use the elevator inside. With confirmation that they had no other way around, Shepard got out too. "Six, Liara and Garrus, with me to check that out. Cortez, keep everyone safe until we get back."

* * *

><p>It was only recently that Citadel fleet was informed of Commander Shepard's brazen escape from lockdown, and of Captain Anderson being put under C-Sec custody and awaiting court-martialing by an Alliance court. Many in the defense fleet did not pay much heed to it, though a few captains had their scanners on high alert. There was a rather large spike in Cerenkov radiation within the Serpentine Nebula. As the ship moved to investigate they discovered nothing.<p>

* * *

><p>Fleet Master Rayta had the fleet amass in the system before Sovereign arrived, arriving together as they continued to use the Nebula to hide. With the Citadel defense fleet leaving them be, Rayta had the Kig-Yar vessels deployed for extra fire support at the ready as pilots of Seraph-class starfighters were waiting for orders to launch. Now it was just a matter of time before they could

unleash their fury against their enemies while continuing to hide from the current defense fleet with minimum power systems active, awaiting Vaht's signal.

* * *

><p>They learned much from Prothean VI, Vigil, the true nature of the Conduit, the Citadel, and how the Protheans on Ilos managed to survive and initiated a plan that helped delay the Reaper invasion that forced Sovereign into this desperate alliance. The very reason why Sovereign needed Saren so they could undo what the Protheans did and usher in the next Reaper invasion.<p>

After learning everything they could from Vigil, including the fact that Saren's views had indeed been corrupted by Sovereign and indoctrination, they had a new resolve as they quickly got back into the Mako and continued onward to the Conduit before it was too late. With Lamenting Light's assistance they cleared out geth resistance far quicker than with the Mako alone, and they didn't need to slow down for the armatures.

Eventually they found the Conduit, active as it sent something out and a small gathering of Geth Colossi standing in their path. "By the Goddessâ€|"

"Keelahâ€|"

Wrex loaded the Mako's main cannon, "We don't have time to admire the view. We have to get through that relayâ€|and these geth aren't going to make it easy on us."

Six turned to Shepard, "He's right. We have to move before it's closed. Light, we need extra fire power to make it."

"But of course Reclaimer. You are about to assist in avenging my creators. They would be most pleased to see how far your kind has progressed."

In a mad dash the Mako rushed toward the Conduit, firing the primary cannon as Lamenting Light provided extra firepower to eliminate two of the geth colossi standing in their path. Reaching the Conduit, Six opened the hatch for Light to get in before the Conduit flung them back to the Citadel.

* * *

><p>As sudden as the Cerenkov radiation spike, the nebula's mass relay became unusually active, even though none of the other patrols reported activity. A fleet emerged with their sights on the Citadel. And at the forefront of the geth fleet, a massive black ship, larger than the Destiny Ascension or any turian dreadnought combined, this imposing ship made a directly line for the Citadel as the geth ships around it started to open fire on the defense fleet.

The sudden surprise of their arrival caught many of their ships defenseless, destroying them before they had a chance to engage their kinetic barriers. As the fleet moved to engage the geth, Matriarch Lidanya fell back to the combat protocols, "Activate the defenses! Seal the station!"

"The arms aren't moving! Systems not responding."

Lidanya didn't like the situation. Something was wrong and now the Citadel was wide open for that massive ship to get in. "Abandon the Citadel! Evacuate the Council!"

"Citadel control! Citadel control! Do you copy?"

* * *

><p>With Saren and his geth already assaulting the station from within, and the geth fleet fighting outside, Saren had two geth on standby to guard the elevator to the Citadel Tower from anyone. Even as a damaged Avina continued to spout on about evacuations the Conduit started spinning faster now.<p>

Before it powered down, it started to act like there was something else coming through. Without warning an Alliance infantry fighting vehicle jumped out, crushing them both before they could react.

The Mako didn't fare so well either, the suspension on two of its wheels were bent out of shape and it had landed on its back against a wall, forcing Jorge to kick open the hatch so they could get out. Vaht wasn't waiting, carefully using the energy sword, he carved an opening large enough for even Wrex to walk out of.

The scene of the Presidium was utter chaos, the holographic ceiling was shut down and fires were burning with debris cutting access to certain areas.

With everyone out, Shepard looked around, concerned about the situation that has broken out. "Garrus, you know C-Sec protocol, what's happening with the civilians?"

"Normally they'd close the Citadel arms to stop the invaders from getting in, but should that fail then C-Sec Academy and a few other facilities would be commandeered for civilian shelters. A few good agents might have gone out to hold down more defensible position for civilians who were cut off."

"All right, Garrus take Ashley, Jorge, Tali, Vaht, and O'Brien. Do everything you can to help with the situation here. Vaht, signal your people and inform them that they're already here, and hope they receive it in time. Everyone else, we're after Saren."

Six stopped as Lamenting Light floated off on his own, "And him? Should we try to restrain him?"

"Let it go. We have more important things to deal with."

As the team split up, the three Dragon's Teeth lowered their converted victims to stop them. Six threw her combat knife, scoring a direct hit at one of their heads. Cortez dropped one's kinetic barrier, moving out of Kaidan way to use her biotics against it. Shepard, Williams and Wrex showed the last one no mercy, blasting it to pieces before it could even get close to them.

While Six made sure the other husk was dead and retrieving her knife, Shepard walked over to Avina. "The Presidium is experiencing severe

system malfunctions across the entire level. All non-emergency personnel must evacuate immediately." Her holographic display has been badly damaged, her image flickering about and unable to maintain itself for long in one position.

"Give me a run-down of the damage."

"We have lost all primary power to the level. Environmental controls are no responding. Class three fires are burning in sectors 2, 3, 6 and 7. Civilian casualties are high. I am also detecting numerous unauthorized synthetic life-forms throughout the station. They are believed to be hostile. Please approach with caution."

"What happened to the Council?"

"In accordance with standard emergency procedures, the Council has been evacuated to the Destiny Ascension."

Six walked over, "Any reports on Captain Anderson or Ambassador Udina?"

"I have no information on the status of specific individuals. Once the current crisis has been resolved, a complete accounting of casualties and survivors will begin."

"Where's Saren?"

"Former Spectre agent Saren Arterius is nearing the vicinity of the Council Chamber. A warrant has been issued for his arrest, though Citadel Security is unable to respond at this time."

Shepard readied her assault rifle, "Come on. We need to stop Saren before it's too late!"

* * *

><p>Saren had reached the Council Chamber as the geth set up defensive position at every possible location. Acting out Sovereign's rage, Saren used a geth rifle and killed a nearby keeper, continuing onto the platform once used to address the Council, now expanded as it reacted to Sovereign's code. With full control over the station at his fingertips, Saren quickly handed it to Sovereign, to command it as he saw fit.<p>

* * *

><p>The Destiny Ascension managed to evacuate the Council, even with the disarray of the assault and lack of communication with the station as they attempted to flee the scenes. As they fled away the station started moving. "The Citadel's closing. They're sealing the station!"

"Don't let the enemy ships inside the arms!" Turian cruisers moved to stop the unknown vessel but they just didn't have the firepower to break through the ship's kinetic barriers. The ship even rammed through one of them just to get within the station before the five arms closed, turning the station into an impenetrable fortress.

As the battle continued and it seemed the Citadel Fleet was to be forced into a retreat, then suddenly more unidentified vessels, some

even outsizing the ship that now resides within the Citadel, came through the nebula clouds .There was some unknown language that started to spout over open comm channels, and they seemed rather intense.

* * *

><p>"Today heretics, you shall feel the full wrath of the Covenant bear upon your shoulder! FIRE!" Plasma turrets and pulse laser turrets targeted geth ships, cutting through them like they would a UNSC vessel. As the first few geth ships fell apart, the Seraph fighters launched to engage the geth fighters. "Have the Kig-Yar hold back to defend the agricultural ships. I want the Sovereign found so we may purge it ourselves and redeem our honor my brothers!" Many of the crew who were not manning any battle important stations roared in excitement as they clamored for the blood of Saren. "Do not let a single geth walk away this day! Show them the cleansing flames that will bring holy righteousness back to our names!"

* * *

><p>Now with Sovereign in position, latching himself onto the Citadel Tower to undo what the Protheans did to delay the Reapers. As it did, Shepard and team were traveling on the elevator when it suddenly stopped on them just short of reaching the Council Chamber. "Saren's locked the elevator! Suit up - we're going outside!"<p>

Shepard waited just long enough for Wrex, Liara, Kaidan and herself to put helmets on before shooting out the glass. Six was the first one out, putting the 0-G training to its fullest until she activated her mag boots. Cortez was close behind her as Shepard and the others were reorienting themselves for combat. Six and Cortez were already moving on ahead of the others, already engaging geth that blasted their way through another elevator just to stop them.

* * *

><p>Even though the Covenant had superior firepower and defenses, Fleet Master Rayta was not letting the fleet underestimate their foes, having never engaged in combat with, or against, the geth in ship to ship.<p>

Unending Resolve, Gratitude and Relentless Salvation were now the spear heads of the Covenant fleet as they cut a swath through the geth fleet. "Fleet Master, the geth are attempting to stop. They outnumber us, eight to one."

"They believe themselves to be a challenge then? Prove their error." Unending Resolve was now the lead ship, as the others fell behind the massive supercarrier in formation. Even as the geth ships pounded missiles and antiship lasers against Unending Resolve, their energy shields barely flinched. This maneuver was to allow their weapons to be close enough to the geth that the plasma visibly left their marks on the ships as they fell apart. One of the damaged ships tried a kamikaze run against Unending Resolve, aiming at the nose but nothing of vital importance was housed in that section.

**A/N: **Part-2 of 3–

* * *

><p>Executor Pallin tossed a grenade at three geth before quickly being forced into cover. A salarian C-Sec agent tried to draw their fire, unfortunately succeeding and got hit by a barrage from the pulse rifles. "Damn it, I told you to keep your heads down! Gradius, check on Marlon. Chellick, we're drawing their fire on three." The geth continued their pattern of fire and cover, waiting for the moment they were waiting for their weapons to cool down.<p>

Instead more fire started to head down range, aimed at the geth. A sniper shot took out a rocket trooper as three more in rapid succession pierced through seven in total. The juggernaut among them started to bash its allies into a rain of fire. With the juggernaut the last one standing all of the fire was concentrated on it until it fell. An eight foot giant with a heavy machine gun walked over to the downed juggernaut as its light started to flicker back on. He took a quick step on it and crushed the head, "And stay dead."

Pallin was the first to see who their saviors were, and to his surprise he knew one of them, "Vakarian? What are you doing here? The last time I saw you, you stormed out of my office quitting and telling me you had joined Commander Shepard."

"I did. And we found Ilos and the Conduit. The very same thing Saren and the geth used to get on the station undetected."

Pallin wasn't in the mood for arguing. "We have diplomats and civilians that need medical assistance and evacuation to shelters."

Garrus readied his rifle, "Well clear the path to the Academy and draw them away for you."

* * *

><p>Six and Cortez continued to push forward though the geth, stopping only because of a dropship deploying more geth. "We've got geth pouring in on our head!"<p>

Six rushed over to the turret controls, jacking Dot into it to unlock the system. Shepard rushed over to her side, "I've got the others. Keep them off me."

Cortez and Wrex moved up to Six's position as Kaidan and Liara provided biotic support. Six popped up firing on the geth, "Go!" now Shepard ran to the other turret controls to reactivate them. The next one was a bit trickier, relaying to Kaidan's omni-tool to assist with the override. Shepard then timed her next sprint, waiting for the next wave to be deployed and for Six and the others to draw their fire. With the three defense turrets activated, Shepard focused fire on the geth as the rockets whittled away at the geth ship. With it enflamed, the ship didn't have much longer as it pulled away from the turrets.

Six grabbed Dot from the controls and moved up as Shepard met her. They stopped at the next crosswalk, having learned their lesson on

haste from the last one. Six used her helmet's side camera to remain in cover and explore to find what to expect. Using hand signals, Six indicated two krogans and a geth destroyer were visible targets.

Shepard grabbed a grenade and rolled it out, using the low gravity to their advantage. Shepard was relying on Six's camera to time the detonation of the grenade, Six gripping her fist to signal the grenade was in position. The detonation caught the two krogans off guard, though the blast itself wasn't lethal to them, the force behind it sent them flying away from the tower as intended. The geth destroyer moved to investigate what had just occurred as a juggernaut came out to provide support.

Shepard baited the geth to come to their side, stepping out for a moment before quickly going back to cover. The destroyer started to run toward them as the juggernaut slowly moved up as back up. When the destroyer came around the corner the team unloaded against it. The intense barrage from six guns was too much for the geth to take as the momentum kept it going into a wall.

With the destroyer disposed of, Wrex walked out and used his biotics to fling the juggernaut off its feet. Six then rushed out, grabbing Emile's kukri as she rammed the blade into the spine of the geth before she used it to smash its eye.

Catching up to Six, Cortez checked the next turn. "Whoa!" quickly pulling his head back as an explosion hit the wall adjacent to him. "The geth have established rocket turrets."

"There has to be something we can do?"

Six took a look now, falling back before the rockets hit. "There's a trench about five meters. If we get someone in, they can lure rocket fire from the others until they reach it."

"And a better position than this corner." Shepard looked out. "I'll go first," getting a shotgun ready just in case. "Cortez and Liara next. Wrex and Alenko. Six, you provide extra covering fire while we get everyone there." Shepard waited for the next volley of rockets to hit before she ran out. A single geth shock trooper was waiting, but Shepard blasted it at point blank, kicking it off the tower as she got her assault rifle ready. "Clear. First group get ready!"

Six moved to the corner, watching the rockets as Shepard started drawing their fire. "Go!" Six opened fire now too, luring a few geth to pop up for her to target.

* * *

><p>With Executor Pallin and the others secured in the C-Sec Academy, Garrus took the others and continued to explore the Presidium for other pockets of geth. Vaht returned to the team having scouted out the geth position. "They are in standard stagger formations with turret fire support established. They have every intention of holding this position."<p>

Garrus could see why, pointing to a stairway going down, "This is one of the main access points to and from the Presidium and Upper Wards on this part of the ring."

"And they're just camping on that spot for unsuspecting victims to get in their crosshairs."

Vaht quickly interrupted O'Brien brimming anger, "Imp, if you could take up position and remove the turret threats, we can take them out quickly before more unsuspecting non-combatants get in the way."

Williams was ready for a fight, but she wasn't use to the new Sangheili just yet. "You seem rather fairly familiar with geth tactics. I thought you guys hated them."

Vaht looked back to the geth, "While we wereâ€| 'allies', the Fleet Master made sure all warriors were acquainted with geth maneuvers and combat logic. He wanted us prepared to compensate for any inefficiency, or to destroy them swiftly."

Jorge looked to the position Vaht pointed out, "Elites like to be prepared for a fight. Just be glad you aren't fighting them," unaware she had. "So, split-lip, any other plans?"

Vaht started looking around the Presidium, trying to think of other assaults he had participated in. "If we can get as many snipers working on drawing the geth's attention, the rest of us could charge them and attack them like warriors."

Garrus knew a few places just perfect for this, "Ash, I could use your marksmanship skills. I know this one sweet spot over there. Taliâ€|"

"I'll hack some of the geth to make it easier."

Vaht nodded. "We will wait for your signal before we attack."

* * *

><p>With the trench position theirs, the team easily dealt with the turrets and destroyed the geth attempting to slow them down. They quickly crossed the barren area they found an access hatch to get into the Council Chamber. After pressurization Six and Cortez scouted ahead as Shepard and the others removed their EVA helmets. Cortez returned to Shepard, "The geth have guards posted right next to the stairs, two left and right."<p>

Shepard waited to look at the area first before she decided anything. "Liara, Kaidan, we need your biotics. Wrex, Six, we're taking them out once they're in the air."

The team circled around the fountain, using the wall to give them cover so the two sides could get into position. Ready, Liara threw a singularity field out, catching the two geth on the right. Kaidan managed to grab the other two in a lift field as the team destroyed them before they could land.

Six crept up to the top of the stairs, keeping a low profile by lying down. She had Dot adjust her HUD to scan for geth signatures to pinpoint their positions. Six pointed them out to the others, another group of four and they were too spread out to use the same tactic as before. The rock garden was going to be a great asset in the

fight.

Six ran into the rock garden, using the oversized stones for cover and drawing the geth fire as the others joined her. Wrex obliterated one of the geth with his shotgun and Kaidan worked with Liara to gun down the one on the right flank. Six had already taken down one as Shepard and Cortez finished the last geth.

And with the fall of the geth, Shepard ran toward the audience chamber but by the time they arrived, Saren was nowhere to be seen, but the master controls were still active so he had to be close. Saren floated up on his platform, tossing a tech mine at the group. Shepard and Wrex jumped out of the way, Cortez was barely able to dodge before the mine detonated. Six pulled Liara Kaidan out of the way, taking cover at the base of the stairs. Six had Saren's head in her scope, and she was tempted to open fire then and there.

Instead, she waited for Shepard's signal as Saren turned to her, "I was afraid you wouldn't make it in time, Shepard."

"In time for what?"

"The final confrontation. I think we both expected it would end like this. You've lost. You know that, don't you? In a few minutes, Sovereign will have full control of all the Citadel's systems. The relay will open. The Reapers will return."

Shepard looked back to Six, "I've got a few tricks up my sleeve."

"You survived our encounter on Vormire. But I've changed since then. Improved. Sovereign hasâ€¦upgraded me."

Shepard quickly looked back, "You let Sovereign implant you? Are you insane?"

"I suppose I should thank you, Shepard. You and your 'demon' friend," looking past Shepard and directly at Six's scope. "After Vormire, I couldn't stop thinking about what the two of you said. About Sovereign manipulating me. About indoctrination. The doubts began to eat away at me. Sovereign sensed my hesitation. I was implanted to strengthen my resolve. Now my doubts are gone. I believe in Sovereign completely. I understand that the Reapers need organics. Join us and Sovereign will find a place for you, too. Both of you."

Six now shouted at the deranged turian, "Sovereign's controlling you through those implants! Don't you see that?"

"The relationship is symbiotic. Organic and machine intertwined, a union of flesh and steel. The strength of both, the weakness of neither. I am a vision of the future. The evolution of all organic life. This is our destiny. Join Sovereign and experience a true rebirth!"

Shepard checked her omni-tool, looking at Vigil's data file, "Sovereign hasn't won yet. I can stop it from taking control of the station! Step aside and the invasion will never happen!"

"We can't stop it! Not forever." Saren turned back to Six as he plead to her to see his sanity, "You saw the visions. You saw what happened

to the Protheans. The Reapers are too powerful."

Shepard glanced back to Six, nodding to her before leaning back toward Saren, "Some part of you must still realize this is wrong. You can fight this!"

Shepard's words seemed to have reached something, as Saren hesitated again, "Maybe you're right. Maybe there is still a chance forâ€¦|unh!" he fell to his knees in pain as his platform started to back away, "The implantsâ€¦| Sovereign is too strong. I'm sorry. It's too late for me."

Shepard got out of cover with her pistol at her side, staring Saren in his eyes, "It's not over yet. You can still redeem yourself!"

Saren found his strength, picking himself up and drawing his pistol to his head. "Goodbye, Shepard. Thank you." With a pull of the trigger, Saren had killed himself rather than attempt to stop Shepard any further, falling off his platform, through the glass and into the garden below. The once proud Spectre had fallen into the trap of indoctrination, but was given one final chance of redemption.

With Saren dead, Shepard quickly raced to the controls and got to work. "Vigil's data file worked. I've got control of all systems."

"Quick! Open the station's arms. Maybe the fleet can take Sovereign down before he regains control of the station!"

"See if you can open a communications channel."

"_â€¦|the Destiny Ascension. Main drive offline. Kinetic barriers down 40%. The Council is on board. I repeat, the Council is on board._"

"_Normandy to the Citadel. Normandy to the Citadel. Please tell me that's you, Commander._"

"I'm here, Joker."

"_We caught that distress call, Commander. I'm sitting here in the Andura sector with the entire Arcturus fleet. We can save the Ascension. Just unlock the relays around the Citadel and we'll send in the cavalry in!_"

Wrex looked disgruntled, more so than usual, "You'd sacrifice human lives to save the Council? What have they ever done for your kind?"

Liara tried to convince their krogan companion otherwise, "This is bigger than humanity. Sovereign's a threat to every organic species in the galaxy!"

"That's why you can't throw away reinforcements trying to save the Council. Hold them back until the Citadel arms open up and the human fleet can go after Sovereign." However Six suspected there was more behind it for Wrex, but without knowing much about him, she had little proof of it.

"_What's the order, Commander! Come in now to save the Ascension or hold back?_"

"Opening the relays now, Joker. We need to save the Ascensionâ€"no matter what the cost!"

"I hope the Council appreciates this."

Six looked out the window, taking over the controls. "Hold them off for a bit longer. Dot, get a comm channel open on the Covenant BattleNet. Fleet Master, this is Sierra-312, do you read?"

"_We read you demon._"

"Fleet Master, we have a distressed ship in need of aid. Can you spare any of your ships to get it cleared of hostiles?"

There was a pause before the Fleet Master spoke, "_The geth have us fighting in close quarters, but Relentless Salvation, a CCS-class battlecruiser is available._"

"Affirmative. Sending the ship's current location now." Six turned to Shepard once the channel was cut, "Now call in the fleet."

* * *

><p>With the relay network active again, the Normandy and the Arcturus fleet rushed in. "_Alliance ships move in! Save the Destiny Ascension!_"

Relentless Salvation was already drawing the attention of the geth, though there were still geth ships after the damaged _Destiny Ascension_. With _Relentless Salvation_'s distraction, the Alliance bull rush proved to be devastating to the geth, catching them completely unprepared for the assault from above, or the extra Covenant fire from below as _Unending Resolve_ joined them.

Caught between three foes, the geth started to target the enemy they had a calculable chance against. Even if the geth managed to take out a few cruisers and fighters, the superior firepower of the Covenant ships proved too much, the geth didn't stand a chance. "_Destiny Ascension, you are all clear. Repeatâ€"you are all clear._"

The two Covenant ships escorted the _Destiny Ascension_ away from the battle to a surviving portion of the Citadel Fleet. The _Normandy_ continued to be the tip of the spear as the Citadel arms started moving once again. "_The Citadel's opening! All ships move in! Concentrate on Sovereign!_"

* * *

><p>With the fleet already beginning their assault, Cortez and Wrex were trying to get a better look at the fallen turian. Shepard glanced to Wrex, "Make sure he's dead."<p>

Wrex nodded as he and Cortez jumped down to the garden below. Wrex grabbed his pistol as he quickly walked to the body, firing once more through the head. With that Cortez looked back up, "Kill confirmed."

Suddenly there was a tremor that started to rock the tower, as everyone braced. They assumed it was Sovereign taken a pounding, but then red bolts of electricity, similar to what Sovereign discharges, traveled through the tower and directly to Saren's body. Sovereign was attempting to bring Saren back, and as the body resisted the buildup of the bolt sent out a shockwave powerful enough to send Wrex back against a wall and Cortez off his feet. Six managed to get Liara and Kaidan away before the extension on the podium gave way. Unfortunately Six couldn't read Shepard in time as she fell rolled down into the garden. Six looked back as Saren's body was standing, wrote in pain as everything of him was going a violent red.

As Shepard and the others below managed to get to their feet, Saren's body started to change, the implants were more extensive than anyone could have foreseen as they changing him, mutating him to fit Sovereign's need as it burned away his armor and flesh. Eventually all that was left was an alter turian skeleton with a pulsating red core within the ribcage. The only other defining feature was the left geth arm he had and his face, Sovereign had kept Saren's skull relatively unchanged, but it was no longer the turian Spectre who managed to fight against Sovereign one last time.

"Commander!"

Shepard got to her feet as she helped Cortez up. The new form resembled a geth hopper with Saren's head adorning it. It quickly hopped off to one of the walls as it started speaking, both with Saren's voice and Sovereign's, "I am Sovereign! And this station is MINE!"

Six took aim at it, trying to keep track of its movements, "Dot?"

"Analyzing."

Wrex tried to stomp on it, but the thing moved too fast for him. "What's there to analyze? Just shot and kill it!"

Cortez and Shepard continued to keep their distance but as it continued to jump it just made things harder. "Complete. An unusual excess of dark energy is emanating from the enemy's core."

Cortez looked up, "Meaning?"

Liara threw out a singularity field, catching the monstrosity in jump, "Meaning it's more susceptible to biotic attack."

Wrex started glowing as he threw his own biotic attack, "That's all I need to hear!"

44. Chapter 44

**A/N: **Part-3 of 3â€¦| so go back two chapters if you haven't already read them.

* * *

><p>The battle against Sovereign wasn't going as well as the Alliance

had hoped. No matter how much of a pounding they give the stationary target, they just weren't able to penetrate the kinetic barrier as the monstrous ship continued to take pot shots at them and inflicted massive damage. "Sovereign's too strong! We have to pull back!"

"_Negative! This is our only chance! Take that monster down, no matter what the cost!_"

"_You will not retreat, humans!_" Two Covenant ships moved in as the Citadel fleet that was still capable of fighting joined them. "_The betrayer will fall this day! With or without your aid!_" Sovereign had prepared to fight against the Covenant, studying their plasma weaponry and developed a pseudo-energy shield to absorb most of it. Though should all Covenant ships assault against it, the shield wouldn't be capable of holding, fortunately the rest of the Covenant fleet was occupied with destroying the remaining geth vessels.

* * *

><p>The three snipers easily took out the turrets as Jorge and Vaht rushed the geth as Tali gave them an extra gun by hacking one of the juggernauts to fight with them. It almost seemed unfair as Vaht cut through three with one slice and Jorge mowing them down before they could attempt to bring his shields down. O'Brien was picking off a few extra geth he could, competing against Garrus and Ashley to see who could eliminate the most geth before Jorge or Vaht could.<p>

* * *

><p>Shepard Cortez and Wrex were on the ground with Sovereign's puppet while Liara, Kaidan and Six provided biotic and fire support from above to whittle away at the thing. Wrex got in a few good hit against the thing, Kaidan had it floating in the air, sending it against the wall with a good smack. This thing just continued to get back on its feet, the rapidly regenerating kinetic barriers weren't exactly helping either.<p>

As Cortez took cover, he looked at it as it started blasting the area. "Kaidan, Wrex. I've got an idea. Shepard, think you can draw it away from us for a bit?"

"Not a problem. I think Sovereign's got a crush on me." Shepard jumped over the cover to keep it busy with Six giving her extra support fire.

Cortez switched off his helmet's speakers, relying on Dot to relay the plan to everyone. "Here my thought, that red core of his, I think it's like the heart or brain, or whatever Sovereign is using to control it. We pop that, we kill it. We need a biotic to distract it so Wrex can pin it to the ground." Cortez pulled out a fragmentation grenade and hung it on his finger by the clip, "I slip this onto one of its ribs and Wrex tosses it before the frag goes off. Any objections?"

"I think I have a better plan." Liara used her biotics and froze the puppet just as it was about to jump. With it frozen in place, Shepard fell back as Cortez took her place. He had to look around, but he soon found a gap with one of the ribs right of the sternum. He slid the clip in and positioning it onto the sternum.

Cortez fell back and Six was ready to shot. "Time."

"Five seconds." Cortez had counted how long Liara's stasis field usually stayed in effect, and his search for a gap in his ribs took most of that time. Six counted until four before she fired. The shot hit the grenade just as the puppet came out of the stasis.

The grenade's explosion took the barrier out, but the thing was still functioning. "Damn, I was hoping it would work."

Shepard got ready for round two, "As long as those shields doesn't regen, I'll be happy." Wrex tried to crush it against the wall it has jumped onto, but the thing jumped away rapidly firing on Wrex. The krogan battlemaster created an extra biotic barrier to soak up most of the hits, though his shields were just barely able to hold their own.

Kaidan caught the thing in his biotics again, allowing everyone to unload into it and just as Shepard had hoped, the kinetic barriers didn't come back. Even after it was released from the lift field, the team did its best to keep the pressure on it. Wrex got in a lucky blast from his shotgun, the puppet tripped over as it collapsed onto one of the rocks. The red core was gone and when the body finally came to rest, it became inflamed, turning everything that was to dust.

* * *

><p>Simultaneously, as Saren's husk of a body disintegrated, something was happening to Sovereign. The red static electricity started jumping all across the ship as its systems started to fail it to the point that Sovereign could no longer keep its grip on the tower.<p>

The debris of so many ships littered around Sovereign, as the _Normandy_ flew by to confirm this unusual activity, "_Its shields are down! Now's our chance!"_

"_Hit it with everything we've got!_" The ships that were about to retreat turned around as every ship opened fire on Sovereign.

The _Normandy_ u-turned with Alliance and Covenant fighter escorts around it back down toward Sovereign. "_Hard on my flank! We're going in!_"

The _Normandy_ fired a disruptor torpedo as it was followed by Covenant class-2 projectile cannon fire. The disruptor torpedo went clean through Sovereign's underside as the opening allowed the Covenant plasma fire to cause even more damage. The explosive events lead to a chain reaction within Sovereign, slowly expanding it before violently exploding to pieces, some of which unfortunately flew back into the tower.

* * *

><p>It took mere minutes for Garrus and the others to reach the tower and start searching for the others. "Damn it Cortez, you're not going out like this!"<p>

"Six! Six, give me a signal that you're alright!"

Vaht continued to move pieces out of their way in their search effort. One of them eventually yielded fruit, "Humans!"

Vaht continued to move the debris as the others arrived. Liara had enveloped the group in a biotic sphere, though Wrex still had to support a piece from crushing them. Anderson was with the team as he rushed over to assist anyone injured. "Take it easy—it's over. You're safe now."

Ashley looked around only seeing four heads, "Where's the Commander, LT?"

"And Six?"

Cortez looked back to where most of the debris was, "She went after Shepard."

Garrus helped Wrex with his injuries, though not knowing if Shepard and Six were still alive plagued them more than their injuries. O'Brien gave Cortez a leg to hobble on as everyone was getting ready to leave. It was until Jorge's motion tracker picked up something, and the distinct sound of metal grinding against metal, did everyone look back once more.

One of the legs was kicked over as Six had Shepard lean on her while she dragged the Commander out. Everyone, even Vaht somewhat, was relieved to see the duo walking out of the carnage, if not slightly worse for wear.

* * *

><p>Captain Anderson and Commander Shepard met with the Citadel Council with Ambassador Udina. Shepard even recommended Anderson for the position as the human representative on the Council as the crew of the Normandy disembarked on their next mission, finding a means of stopping the Reapers for good.<p>

Though most of the non-human crew remained, Wrex and Vaht had left the team. Wrex accomplished what he had wanted, killing Saren, twice, and got to kill a hell of a lot more before that. Vaht had returned to his people, planning to return to Tali's side once his people had established a planet to call home, for now—

Amongst the Covenant, the Kig-Yar that were in ships broke away once Sovereign was destroyed, using the mass relay network to disappear. Though the few true devout among their kind remained at the Fleet Master's side, ready to fight as he saw fit. The others had little choice in the matter, seeing as it was stay or journey into the void of space without a ship.

* * *

><p>The Kig-Yar who managed to escape Fleet Master Rayta's command during the chaos of Sovereign's demise eventually found their way to Omega. They were uncertain as to what to expect when they found out about the Pirate Queen of the Terminus, but seeing the Omega space station they knew they could work this rather easily. With a salvaged translation device taken from the geth, the Kig-Yar managed to tweak

it to function for their language. When they got through the airlocks, they were greeted by more turians, and a new species. Four-eyed muscular things, but their overall build was still humanoid, almost to the point that they looked like humans with different heads. Shipmistress Chur'R-Zer pushed one of her people aside, with the translator strapped to her chest, "Take us to Aria T'Lok."<p>

Aria watched them approach her seat, escorted by her people, as the ones presented to her bowed. "We are honored to meet you, esteemed Queen of Omega."

Aria continued to look away from them, barely giving them a glance. "Flattery will only get you so far. What are you and what do you want?"

"I am Shipmistress Chur'R-Zer. We are Kig-Yar. And we seek employment."

Aria wasn't interested. "If you can't see, I have all the man power I could ever want. So why do I need the likes of you?"

Chur'R-Zer snapped her talons, as two muscular Skirmishers jumped into the booth and the two with her activated their point defense gauntlets and protected Chur'R-Zer from Aria's guards, "In a few generations, our people adapt to any new environments. Our ancestors have even settled on asteroids like this before. Our eyes are sharp enough to spot any unusual activity. Our sense of smell is excellent enough that we can differentiate the different patrons, and hunt them down if you so desire. And even in this noise, I can hear the many conversations being had. We are snipers, scouts, shock troopers, and we very good at finding anything or anyone. And we are very good at what we do."

Aria was still suspicious of Zer's motives, "So why come to me if you can already start your own raiding parties?"

Chur'R-Zer has seen people like her, mostly among her own, and a few from the San 'Shyuum, "If we did, we'd have to work though you eventually. I thought we could skip the middle man, as it were, and just work directly under you. Plus," she turned to the turian guards, "I know we'd be far superior than his breed could ever serve."

The two turians were about to do something, but Aria gave her wicked smile as she finally turned toward them. "I like you. You're ambitious, quick tongued, and you know your place. I'm willing to give you and your people a test. If things work out, we'll arrange a more permanent situation."

Zer bowed again, "I assure you, Aria, you're making a great new investment."

* * *

><p>After about a month since Sovereign's demise, Vaht had returned to the Normandy to continue his service to Tali'Zorah. The Alliance continued to learn from the remains of the _Long Night of Solace_, UNSC ships and weapons to improve their capabilities and stance among the other races. Lamenting Light was asked to help Fleet Master Rayta with the colonization and enlightenment of his people,

both of which the monitor gladly accepted, once permitted by the Reclaimers.

Even with this time that has passed chasing geth, they had no new leads on the Reapers. "Disengaging FTL drive. Emission sinks active. Board is green—we are running silent."

Pressly walked into the cockpit, "We're wasting our time. Four days searching up and down this sector, and we haven't found any sign of geth activity."

"Three ships went missing here in the past month. Something happened to them."

Pressly still though they were on a wild goose chase, "My money's on slavers. The Terminus System is crawling with them."

Ensign Helen Lowe was also in the cockpit when she noticed an unusual reading, "Picking up something on the long-range scanner. Unidentified vessel. Looks like a cruiser."

Joker pulled up the readings, "Doesn't match any known signatures."

"Cruiser is changing course. Now on intercept trajectory." Lowe double checked to be certain.

"Can't be." Pressly took a seat and check their systems, "Stealth systems are engaged. There's no way a geth ship could possibly—"

"It's not the geth." Joker suddenly had a bad feeling in his gut, activating the ship wide comm, "Brace for evasive maneuvers!"

As Joker began the maneuvers the unidentified ship opened fire, hitting them and caused damage across the board, including the terminal Pressly was on. "Pressly!" Lowe tried to help him, only for an explosion to kill her.

"Kinetic barriers down. Multiple hull breaches. Weapons offline. Somebody get that fire out!" Joker was doing everything he could to keep the ship alive, though already crippled the enemy continued their relentless assault.

* * *

><p>"Come, there is nothing we can do. This vessel is done."<p>

Tali wouldn't budge, continuing her work even as fires started erupting from the consoles. "Just a bit more—we can—"

Vaht pulled her away, "There is nothing we can do."

"Come on, everyone else is already out!" Adams pulled Tali's arm as Vaht shielded them both until they could reach the elevator.

Jorge was holding the elevator open, "Everyone in, now!"

Six, O'Brien and Cortez secured their weapons as they helped anyone who was injured. "Damn, I hate party crasher!"

Six tapped Jorge's shoulder, "Elevator's full. We'll catch the next ride."

Jorge nodded, "Don't plan on pulling what I did."

"Never crossed my mind."

As the elevator left the trio alone, O'Brien turned to her, "I hope it has time to come back for us." Another explosion, this one came from engineering. "Now I really hope it does."

* * *

><p>Kaidan had suited up as he rushed through the ship to the sleeper pods. "Shepard!"<p>

Shepard was also suited in her armor as she donned her helmet, "Distress beacon is ready for launch."

"Will the Alliance get here in time?"

Another hit rocked the ship as Shepard help keep Kaidan stand, as much as for herself. "The Alliance won't abandon us," grabbing a nearby fire extinguisher and tossing it to Kaidan to help, "We just need to hold on. Get everyone onto the escape shuttles."

"Joker's still in the cockpit. He won't abandon ship. I'm not leaving, either."

Shepard turned back from working on another part of the ship, taking the extinguisher from Kaidan, "I need you to get the crew onto the evac shuttles. I'll take care of Joker."

Another internal explosion rocked them as Shepard pulled a few more wires to keep things going a bit longer, "Commanderâ€|"

"Kaidan. Go," looking back to him, her eyes pleading to Kaidan, "Now."

"Aye, aye." Shepard launched the beacon and signaled the abandon ship order. Jorge was already at the escape pods with the crew from engineering.

Williams rushed Chakwas and a few others in, "Everybody in! Go, go, go!" An explosion unfortunately killed a crewmember before she could reach the pod. Kaidan arrived and Ashley didn't like that he was alone, "Where's the Commander?"

Kaidan looked away from her, hesitant to say. "She's staying behind to get Joker."

Six, O'Brien and Cortez just arrived when he said that. Six looked back, "I'm going in."

"Six!"

She turned to Jorge, "I'll get out, with Shepard and Joker. I promise."

Jorge nodded, "You better." O'Brien, Cortez and Jorge take up one pod as the rest of the crew divided among the other five.

Six rushed over to the distress beacon controls, finding Shepard was still there. "Hitomi? I thought I ordered everyone to abandon ship?"

"Your pilot isn't listening either." She looked up toward the bridge, "We can all get out in his."

There wasn't much she could do now that the other pods had already jettisoned. The two cross the burning mess hall as they heard Joker over the comm. "_Mayday, mayday, mayday! This is SSV Normandy. We've suffered heavy damage from an unknown enemy. Come on, baby. Hold together. Hold together!_"

As the door opened to the CIC, the ship was in worse condition then they could have anticipated. Much of the hull above them was gone, the CIC was flickering with what little life it had as chairs and bodies floated about. Dot calculated that the _Normandy_ was entering a rather stable orbit about the planet above, though it would only last for so long as the ship was not disturbed any further. At the cockpit the found Joker had the emergency barrier projected and a kinetic barrier EVA helmet to continue his attempts to fly what little of a ship there was. "Come on, Joker! We have to get out of here!"

"No! I won't abandon the _Normandy_! I can still save her!"

Shepard tried to speak some sense back into him, "The _Normandy_'s lost. Going down with the ship won't change that."

Joker finally stopped piloting, looking down as he could no longer lie to himself. "Yeahâ€¦okay. Help me up."

As Shepard got Joker to his feet, Six noticed the readings, "Commander."

"They're coming around for another attack!"

"No," Six turned with her DMR at the ready, "Boarding party."

The massive ship was now side by side with the _Normandy_, as the unidentified invaders landed near the CIC completely unarmed and in masses. Shepard pulled Joker out of his chair to hasten their escape, "Ah! Watch the arm." Six continued to hold the enemy off, forced to pull out her pistol and fire both that and her DMR at their unending numbers. Eventually she was forced into hand-to-hand combat and using both knife and kukri against these unknown hostiles. Getting closer to these aliens, Six's mind continued to compare them to the Sangheili in overall form crossed with the Yanme'e, four golden eyes with a tough exoskeleton. A couple managed to grab her arm once or twice, but her heightened reflexes and strength won out each time.

One of these strange insect humanoid was glowing, the eyes more so than the others and various cracks were formed all across its body as it used a strange form of biotics to repel Six's attempt to strike it with her combat knife. Slightly dazed by this sudden unknown, the insectoid took this opportunity to knock Six aside with the back of

its arm, assuming her to have been dealt with.

"Hitomi!"

Shepard got Joker into the pod as she tried to help Six but as soon as she left Joker's side something bite the back of her neck. When she pulled it off, it was a bug that fit in the palm of her hand and its stinger still covered with her blood. Shepard could feel something was stiffening her joints as it was getting harder for her to move. She turned back to Joker, completely vulnerable in the pod, though his chances here were less then savory if she didn't act fast. "Commander! Shepard!" Shepard fought with every fiber of her being to punch the external jettison button and launched the last life pod before her entire body finally froze up on her.

The invaders seemed to have acquired what they wanted. They grabbed the frozen Commander Shepard along with their fallen and prepared to leave. Six was hurt, but it wasn't anything serious, at least compared to injuries she had sustained before. When she came to she saw Shepard in the arms of the glowing one as it walked past her. "Dot?"

"Yes, Noble Six?"

"I need you to emit a signal, one that only I can follow. Keep that signal alive as long as possible without anyone else noticing. You're going to be with Shepard for a while, so you're going to be limited. You are to ensure Shepard's survival and ensure I can still reach her. Are your mission parameters set?"

There was a momentary pause as Dot finalized her adjustments to Six's armor systems. "Parameters set. I will await your swift return, Noble Six."

Six pulled Dot out of her helmet and inserted her into a small port on Shepard's back normally reserved for medical or armor microframe analysis. Six watched the unknown invaders expose their very insect-like wings on their backs and returned to the awaiting ship above. Six grabbed her weapons, floating out of the Normandy and looked out to the seven life pods floating and waiting for pickup. Six then turned to watch the unknown ship turn away from them, letting the other live.

Six pulled her way to her intended destination, unfortunately for the others it wasn't to the life pods.

"Jorgeâ€|Cortezâ€|O'Brienâ€|everyoneâ€|" Six unlatched the undamaged YSS-100 Sabre from underneath the husk that was once the Normandy, "I'm sorryâ€|" She entered the pilot's seat and flew off, away from their pods. She had no intension of losing Shepard to those bugs and she was going to the one place she could to launch this suicide rescue mission, the one place that had the resources she needed, the one place she knew would be waiting for herâ€|

* * *

><p>AN: **You know that weird circle thing on the back of the armor, right between the assault rifle and sniper rifle(used as the heavy weapon holder in ME2), that's where Dot is.

And like I said in the first chapter of this three chapter update,

I'm ending the 'story', but not ending the story. I will pick up where I left off under a new story title(still working on the name), so just give me time to work on the title and it should be up soon enough.

Now I know what some of you are about to yell next, 'You're disrupting the Liara/Shadow Broker complex,' and to that I say I do not care. She's too much of a Bioware lovechild. And by that I mean she gets the most screen time and dialogue than any squadmate(cumulatively), she is the only character that has an appearance in almost every pieces of Mass Effect merchandise/story it's not even funny anymore(I'm looking at you Kotobukiya statuette and Paragon Lost scene, too much). Hell, she can't even die until ME3, and even then, unless you screw the pooch for everyone else, she's still protected!

Now don't get me wrong, I think she's alright as a character(fairly decent, if not at times, squishy squadmate), but stop trying to ram blue alien sex down our throats! If I really wanted that, I'd just go green and look to Star Trek.

End
file.